GUARD YOUR DAUGHTERS

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A Novel by

Diana Tutton

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For
M.G.F.O.

CHAPTER I

I'M very fond of my new friends, but I do get angry when they tell me how dull my life must have been before I came to London. We were queer, I suppose, and restricted, and we used to fret and grumble, but the one thing our sort of family doesn't suffer from is boredom.

I think I'll start with the afternoon when I introduced Gregory to the family. I'd been into Wools for the rations, and I took the short cut home across the Common, that had seemed so big and wild when we were children. It had a few patches of ling, and used to play the part of the Heather when we were being Alan Breck and David. But it was dwindled now to an acre or two of poor soil, where gorse grew, and where birds which I never troubled to identify had their homes among the small bright bogs. The ground was under snow today, with rushes sticking up, and the gorse bushes were black and thin, but on one of them I found a few flowers.

I came out on to the main road and looked carefully to see if any cars were coming before I crossed. I was often careless about traffic on other roads, but I'd been thoroughly drilled on this one when I was little. Then I started to run down the road, swinging my basket and trying to remember whose turn it was to get tea today. If it was mine I shouldn't have time to write up my diary (I wanted to put in some lofty thoughts about that bit of flowering gorse), but on the other hand I would make toast and fairly drown it in illicit butter, and I knew where to find a tin of Australian honey, sent by an admirer of Father's.

Our gate, its brick pillars topped by stone balls and overhung by lilac trees, opens awkwardly at the top of a rise. It didn't matter to us as we'd no car, but tradesmen used to grumble because we kept the gate shut, and they had to park their cars just below the slope and walk the last few yards.

Gregory's little green car was standing just where they always stood, and at first I thought the milkman had suddenly decided to pay us an afternoon visit, but then I saw a young man walking in at our gate, so I quickened my run and caught him up just before he got to the front door. The drive is a very short one.

"It's no good ringing," I panted, "the bell's broken."

He looked rather surprised, but he had a speech all ready so he brought it out. "Good afternoon" (he had a nice voice). "My car has broken down. I wonder if you would be so kind as to let me use your telephone?"

"The only thing is," I said, "that we haven't one."

His eyes rounded, and he looked at the wires which ran to a corner of the house.

"Oh yes we used to have one," I said, "but they've taken it away." Then, when he looked shocked and sympathetic, I added: "We could pay for it all right, but it worried Mother."

Even then he looked surprised, but he smiled politely and said: "Then I'd better be getting on."

"Oh no," I said. "Come in and have some tea. We'll have hot buttered toast and honey—would you like that? Come round into the garden first, and meet Mother," and I started to lead the way round the house.

Almost all the windows of our home are symmetrically placed at the back and front, and the side nearest to the road is just a tall blind brick wall, rather dark because of the horse-chestnut tree. Gregory stopped dead here and said: "But I ought to be getting on. Surely *someone* must have a telephone?"

"Don't worry," I said. "The postman will be here in a

minute on his bicycle, and I'll tell him to let the Garage know about your car. What's wrong with it?"

"I suspect the filter," he said earnestly but unintelligibly. "This is very kind of you, Miss—er——"

"Harvey. What's yours?"

"Manning. Gregory Manning." He smiled. "Why do you look so surprised? We haven't met before, surely? I couldn't *possibly* have forgotten." He emphasized the "possibly" and stared flatteringly at my face.

"No, it's not that," I said. "It's just—*Gregory*! You don't *look* like Gregory!" You see I'd always thought of Gregory as little and dark and mean, and here he was, tall, blond, brown-eyed; with a peculiarly sweet-tempered mouth and almost no eyebrows. He looked very young and pink-cheeked, but I found out later that he was twenty-six. "Come on," I said, getting a grip on his arm, and I walked firmly on round the other corner of the house to find Mother.

She was there, sweeping the snow off the paved terrace, and I tried to see her with a stranger's eyes, for Gregory's sake, but I loved her so much that it was difficult. There was a little smile on her beautiful, drawn face, and she was singing a very sad Hebridean song, quietly, and rather flat. She wore no hat; her rather coarse hair, black streaked with white, hung loosely round her face. She had Father's old black raglan coat buttoned about her slight figure, and falling to her snowboots. We all owned snowboots (huge things of black cloth and rubber to pull on over our shoes) and I thought everyone else must have them too; but seeing Gregory's eyes on Mother's feet I wondered if he'd never seen them before. Funny, he didn't seem to have noticed mine.

Mother didn't see us at first, and she was so graceful and aristocratic in her funny old clothes that I hated to disturb her. It was a bold experiment, too, that I was trying and I paused to gather courage. But I could feel Gregory beside me planning a dash for freedom, and I wasn't going to

lose him without a struggle. I said loudly: "Mother! May I introduce Mr. Manning to you? His car has broken down outside."

Mother looked astounded, as well she might. She said remotely: "Where were you going, Mr. Manning?"

"To Town."

"Oh." London is a long way off. Mother's slow welcoming smile transformed her face, and she came forward. "Then you'd certainly better come in for a little and get warm." She laid her hand on his arm, dropping the broom, and began to steer him back round the house towards the front door, talking earnestly as she went. "There's nothing so good as sweeping," I heard her say. "It's because it's so rhythmic, you know. Scything is the same. It's the *natural* labour that brings peace of heart"—her voice died away as I picked up the broom and ran in by the garden door to get tea.

I found Cressida in the kitchen, piling cups on to a big tray, so apparently it wasn't my turn today. "I'll help you, Cress," I said, grabbing the bread knife, and noticing with approval that the kettle was singing already. "We've got a young man to tea."

Cressida's sea-green eyes bulged. "A *what*?"

"Not a Loch Ness Monster, pet. Quite an ordinary young man." I switched on the grill and went on cutting bread.

"To tea with *us*? Who is he? Who on earth asked him?"

"I did. Well, Mother did, really."

"*Mother* did? Where does he come from?"

"I think he lives in London. Anyway, that's where he's going. Merely a bird of passage, ducks. He broke down outside."

Cressida's eyes returned to normal. "Oh I see. Well I only hope the Room's looking tidy. Oh Lord, Morgan, how frightful!"

"What?" I was pulling off my snowboots, while the grill heated.

"Mother's stockings! They're right across in front of the fire! What on earth will he think? They're steaming wet!"

"Well, I expect someone's moved them by now," I said, going to one of the big built-in cupboards and climbing on to a chair. "Come and hold this chair a minute, Cress; I'll have to stand on the back."

"What do you want from the top shelf?" she said, kneeling on the chair while I scrambled up.

"Honey and cake. Here we are." I came down triumphantly with two tins. "Dundee!" I smacked my lips. "Where's the tin-opener? Watch my toast for me." I began to hack at the honey tin, hurting my hand on the blunt opener.

"I'd better get a jar or something for that," said Cressida doubtfully.

"Why ever? The tin's all right."

"No, really, Morgan; everyone has a cut glass jar except us."

"How do you know? I bet they don't really." But Cressida was rootling in the china cupboard, and finally produced a small china jam pot, covered with rosebuds and dust. While she washed it I turned the toast. "Who's in the Room," I asked, "besides Mother's stockings?"

"Only Teresa, reading."

"Father upstairs? Where's Thisbe?"

"Don't know. Your hair's a bit of a mess."

"I know, I've been running. It's lovely out." Mrs. Phillips had left rather a greasy-looking comb on the dresser, and I grabbed it and pulled it through my hair.

Cressida was shocked. "*Darling*, how disgusting of you! I'll take Father's tray up," she added, "and you take a first instalment in and see how your young man's getting on. What's his name?"

"Gregory!" I said, and laughed at her face. "But he's not a bit like one." I took a tray and staggered to the door. "What's the betting I drop your precious honey jar?" I

got to the door of the Room and then waited for Cressida to open it. She had Father's tea-tray neatly balanced on one arm and she shot away directly she'd turned the handle. I knew she'd do her hair before she came down again to meet Gregory.

He was sitting tensely on the edge of a chair making conversation to Teresa, while Mother leant back in her corner with closed eyes, savouring the fire's warmth. The stockings were still flagrantly present, although they'd been moved aside. Mother's snowboots were lying on the Persian carpet.

Gregory bounded to his feet. "Oh *there* you are," he said. "About that postman you mentioned——"

"We'll hear him whistling in a minute," I said. "It's all right, he always comes to the front door." I arranged my tray load while he watched me, showing the whites of his eyes. "Come on," I said. "There's lots more to carry." I led him back to the kitchen, and heard Cressida run downstairs and into the Room. I knew we'd find the stockings and snowboots gone when we went back. "Oh, Gregory!" I said. "The toast's burning!"

He was quite handy in the kitchen, I found. He cut more bread while I sat on the table and watched. "I thought you'd completely deserted me," he said reproachfully.

"I was getting your tea."

"But honestly, Miss Harvey——"

"Morgan."

"I—beg your pardon! I could have sworn you said——"

"Yes I did. My name's Morgan Harvey."

"A hyphen? Haven't you a Christian name somewhere about you? I mean, you did call me Gregory."

"Morgan *is* my Christian name! Well, not very Christian perhaps; it's after Morgan La Fée. She was rather a nasty witch."

Gregory swallowed. If he'd had any eyebrows worth

mentioning they'd have been down the back of his neck by this time. He brushed my infuriating name away, and said wildly: "In any case, the point is *my car*! I can't stay here all night."

I was tempted to say that he could, but I knew Mother wouldn't allow it. So I tried to be soothing. "The postman will be here in a minute, and he'll take a message to Brown's. Then young pimply James Brown will be back here in no time with a torch and a spanner fixing your car. And in about twenty minutes—just when we're finishing tea—it will be ready and road-worthy and you'll be able to go roaring and honking and whistling home. Chuck that bread over."

"But he may not be able to——"

"There *is* the postman. Watch that toast!" I ran to the front door and had a hurried conversation with the gap-toothed little man outside.

"All right, Miss Morgan. Very good, Miss!" And as Gregory, not trusting me, appeared at my elbow, he added: "Better put your lamps on, sir, it's growing powerful dark."

Gregory thanked him, and rushed down to the gate. I think he would have bolted if he hadn't luckily left his mackintosh in the hall. I turned the last pieces of toast, and in a moment he rejoined me, pinker than ever from the cold outside. "You're very dynamic, aren't you, Morgan?" he said rather sulkily.

"Bossy," I agreed. "Come on, tea's ready. Could you carry these, please?" I filled his hands and then shepherded him into the Room, where I introduced him to Cressida (who had brushed her red hair and done a lightning change into a new jumper), and to Thisbe, who wore skiing trousers and a scarlet shirt. They looked most arresting, and I could see that Gregory was impressed. Even young Teresa, for all she's too fat, looks very sweet with her round pink face and trustful expression, and she's the only one with fair hair. Mother, of course, is simply beautiful, so I hoped Gregory appreciated his luck in being with

us all. He looked from one to the other of us with a gratified expression, and said—excluding Mother: "Four of you, by heaven!"

"Five," said Cressida, beaming. "The oldest one's married."

"What's *her* name?"

"Pandora."

Gregory opened his mouth and silently shut it again. He began to tick us off on his fingers. "Pandora's the eldest——" he said.

"Then me, Thisbe."

"Thisbe. Then——" He looked inquiringly from Cressida to me. She finished it for him. "Then Morgan, Cressida, Teresa."

He nodded. He seemed awed. Cressida began to pour out tea. I took Mother's across to her tall winged chair and she opened her eyes and thanked me. Cressida plied Gregory with toast and honey and he balanced his plate on his knees and stared around him.

Thisbe came over to him with a slight swagger. She is much smaller and slighter than Cressida and me. "We *are* rather quaint, aren't we?" she said.

Gregory looked extremely embarrassed. I could see that he was trying to think of some gallant reply, but in the end he only managed: "You're certainly an unusual family, with most unusual names."

"Nice, aren't they?" said Thisbe casually. "Mother chose them all except Teresa, and by then she'd got tired, so Father had a go. That's why Teresa has such a common name."

He didn't know how to take this, which was, of course, exactly what Thisbe had intended. So he turned to Teresa, who was bent over her book reading with absorption, eating toast at the same time, and with tears running down her cheeks and splashing on to her blue skirt. "What are you reading, Teresa?" asked Gregory.

"It's a book by Broster," she said politely. "It's called

Sir Isumbras at the Ford. It's *very* sad. I'm reading it for the third time."

"And it still makes you cry?"

"Oh yes, I always cry."

Gregory looked sympathetic. "And you like that?"

"Oh yes." I knew that Teresa was dying to go on reading, but she, like Pandora, has the naturally good manners which come from a kind heart, and she has never snubbed anyone in her life. None of the rest of us is like this. Cressida tries awfully hard so that her politeness is forced; Thisbe rather enjoys making people uncomfortable, and I never think about it at all.

"I have a sister about your age," began Gregory more confidently. "What are you, fifteen?"

"Yes."

"Ah yes, so is my Jennifer. She's mad on hockey—are you?"

"No, I'm afraid not."

"Netball? What do you play at your school?"

"I don't go to school."

Poor Gregory, after feeling quite comfortable for a few moments, was now puzzled again. He felt worse when Thisbe said: "*None* of us ever went to *any* sort of school. We regard them as sinks of ignorance and unnatural vice."

Here Cressida broke in with a forced laugh that implored Gregory to treat this statement as a joke. He joined in, rather faintly, and Cressida leaned forward (she was sitting on the floor) and said earnestly: "Of course we really feel we've missed an awful lot by not going to school. All that hockey, and—er—and netball——"

"And glorious, glorious botany!" said Thisbe unfairly.

"And midnight feasts and pillow fights!" said I.

"And running away——"

"And being expelled——"

"And lusting after the Games Mistress——"

"Oh don't talk such nonsense, you two," interrupted Cressida.

Mother said unexpectedly: "Thisbe, darling, what about your ironing? I don't want to hurry Mr. Standing, of course, but when you've all finished tea——"

"*Manning*, Mother dear," I said. "It's all right, Gregory, there's no hurry. James will come and knock when the car's ready."

Mother gave me a piercing glance, and then uprose and drifted from the room, so magnificently unaware of Gregory's existence that a polite speech died on his lips. Thisbe said: "Come on, Cressida, let's clear away."

"Can I help?" said Gregory.

"No, you stay and talk to Morgan. You've done your share."

Cressida might have protested that so had she done hers, but she bowed to what was clearly Thisbe's sense of fair play, and I was left alone—except for the rapt Teresa—with my discovery.

I must say Gregory seemed very pleased about it. He watched tall red-haired Cressida and little swashbuckling Thisbe with appreciation as they left the room, but then he leaned back in his chair, hitching up the knees of his trousers, and studied—I felt it—my profile.

I was quite excited. He was *very* good looking, and about as common in our household as a plover's egg. I said casually, looking into the fire: "Do you often come down this way, Gregory?"

"Not very often, but I do occasionally."

"Well," I said, smiling at the fire and feeling shy, "you'll know where to look for toast next time."

"May I really come in again, Morgan? You've been extraordinarily kind——"

"If overwhelming," I finished, and wished I hadn't when he looked disconcerted again. Bother the young man! He had to be handled like Crown Derby.

"Do you ever come to London?"

"Practically never," I said mournfully, and then with hope: "But of course now that Pandora lives up there——"

"You're sure to come up and stay with her, aren't you?"

"Yes, sure," I said, really feeling sure for the moment.

"Well, perhaps we could do a show or something," said Gregory.

"Oh!" I said over-eagerly, forgetting about the Crown Derby. "That would be simply heavenly, Gregory. I would *adore* it!"

"Good," said Gregory rather nervously, and I pulled myself together. "I haven't been to a play for months!" I said.

This stupendous under-statement had put us on a comfortable footing, and I was just beginning to ask intelligent questions about Gregory's work, when Thisbe came back, with an ironing board under one arm. She propped it up head and tail with books, on the grand piano, and went out again. This habit of Thisbe's maddened me, but she always said the kitchen table was too low and made her back ache, and of course today she didn't want to be out of the Room for too long in case she missed something interesting. She came back with a bundle of wet clothes, and plugged in the electric iron.

I could see that Gregory was quite paralysed with astonishment and Cressida, coming in at Thisbe's heels, was so tight-lipped that I knew they'd been quarrelling. Cressida said: "You must excuse the family ironing, Mr. Manning," and sat down disapprovingly by the fire.

Gregory said: "Yes, yes, of course. Indeed," and watched Thisbe. Despite the fact that he was suffering from shock he could hardly take his eyes off her tight little bottom in the ski-ing trousers, and I found this rather irritating.

I said: "You must leave me your address, Gregory." He instantly produced a beautifully engraved card, an *extraordinary* thing to have about one at the right moment. "I'll just add my telephone number," he said, unscrewing a fountain pen, and he wrote some neat little figures at the

bottom. Then he said: "Miss—er—I mean Thisbe, are you a keen ski-er?"

Thisbe looked over her shoulder. Although I was angry I had to admit that she was most beguiling. "No, not a bit," she said.

"Oh! Do you mean you didn't *like* it?"

"I've never tried."

"I see." (He obviously didn't.) "Is lugeing more your sport?"

"Never tried that either." Thisbe proceeded calmly to iron a dreadful torn pair of cami-knickers.

"Those trousers——" said Gregory persistently.

"Oh *these*!" Thisbe turned round and beamed at him. "I've never been abroad in my life!" she said. "I just bought them because I liked them. Don't you think—" she added, returning to her ironing, "that they're rather a nice shape?"

"I do," said Gregory sincerely.

I think Cressida and I were both planning some sort of an attack on Thisbe when young James Brown knocked at the door to say that he'd sorted the car. Gregory thanked us, shook hands all round (I was glad that he held my hand last and longest) and turned to go. In putting on his mackintosh he bumped into the grandfather clock in the hall. Its door flew open, and out fell about fifty wet stockings and a pair of snowboots.

After he'd gone Cressida said: "Oh damn everything!" and her eyes were wet from humiliation.

But Thisbe and I laughed so much that we could hardly pick up the stockings.

CHAPTER II

AFTER all this unusual excitement the next day would have been dull indeed, had there not been a visit from Pandora to look forward to, her first since her marriage. Her bedroom had been nipped into by the next eldest "before Pandora's cold from the church," said Thisbe, as she tore down Pandora's curtains and threw her eiderdown triumphantly into the landing. Thisbe's move left me in sole possession of a lovely big attic whose dormer window looked down the length of the garden, over the wall, and away for miles. I was beginning to plan a few alterations there when Cressida came stamping up my stairs to say that it was awful sharing a room with a romantic child of fifteen who knew nothing of life, and couldn't I let her—Cressida—join me up here? At first I thought I'd stand up for my rights, but then it struck me that Cressida, at eighteen, had very little in common with Teresa; not nearly as much as I had myself. So I said: "All right, but if I'm to have anyone up here I'll have Teresa, she's quieter than you." I could tell Cressida was hurt by her smile and her noisy expression of thanks, but I felt I'd done enough in letting her have a room to herself. It was really much the best solution, as Cressida was always harrying Teresa about her untidiness, and nothing could make my room much worse than it was already. Besides, Teresa was a companionable little thing and looked up to me, which I enjoyed.

So Cressida now had a big airy room on the first floor, and although I pretended to despise her housewifely ways I did notice that her neatness was more æsthetic than my muddle.

Pandora, of course, as Mrs. James Tremayne, would sleep in the spare-room, a pleasant, smallish room with faded lilac-sprigged curtains and the most enthralling

scenes from the Bible enacted on the blue and white tiles of its fireplace. There was a lovely big bed with brass knobs, and there would have been plenty of room for James, but he couldn't come this time. I was rather glad about this, as I thought it would be embarrassing for Pandora the first evening to say good night to us all as we chattered our way up the familiar stairs, and then openly disappear into the spare-room with a man. I didn't see how she could possibly carry it off with coolness. But perhaps marriage toughened one, I reflected, and of course she would have to do it sooner or later.

Pandora is a darling and I was longing to see her and tell her all about Gregory, whom I had built up in his absence to almost divine proportions.

We all went down to the station to meet her, and piled ourselves into her taxi shouting each other down and admiring her neat suit—which we'd seen before—and her dear little hat, which we hadn't. She also had the most beautiful suède, fleece-lined boots, such as people wear in the *Tatler*, and I decided that all Gregory's friends had these, and that was why Mother's feet had surprised him. Dear Pandora looked lovelier than ever. She has one of those serene faces that don't strike one terrifically at first, in the way that Thisbe and Cressida and I strike people, but she is really much more beautiful than any of us when you have a good look at her. I hope Teresa will be like that when she grows up and gets thin, with the addition, of course, of bright blonde hair and the clearest skin imaginable. She'll end up, I tell her, by knocking spots off us all.

Of course Pandora was mobbed all evening—even Father joined in at tea-time—and I never got her to myself for a moment. We even followed her into her room (so it was a good thing James *wasn't* there) to admire her chiffon nightdress, and Teresa made us laugh by saying

that she ought to wear a petticoat under it. In the end we all left together, and the next morning was just as bad, until at about half-past eleven I suddenly remembered that someone had to go round to the Farm. I was just going to whisper to Pandora about it when she whispered to me: "Can't we go out somewhere? I want to talk."

"Back door. Two minutes," I muttered, and we slipped separately from the room, and managed to escape unnoticed on to the road.

Pandora hadn't bothered to go upstairs for one of her posh new coats but had taken Cressida's from the pegs in the back passage. It was much too long for her, but I loved to see her in it, for I felt that she had really come home to us, quite unchanged and as accessible as ever.

We marched along the road arm in arm, staying in the middle at first, because the sides were slushy. "It's a shame about all that good snow going to waste," I said. "You should have been here two days ago; it was perfect then."

A car came up behind us and we leapt for the path with water splashing over the tops of our snowboots (Pandora had on her old ones today). "You don't know how I love coming back," she said. "Better stay on the path, darling, hadn't we?"

"Yes, all right. What's it like being married? Nice?"

"*So* nice!"

"I know James is nice, and going to bed, and having new clothes, but what's it like being alone all day?"

"Well, I'm not alone really. People are very friendly, and there's the shopping, and the Daily Woman, who comes three times a week and isn't a woman but a girl about your age."

"Is she nice?"

"Yes, I think she is really. Much nicer than Mrs. Phillips, only I don't understand her point of view very well."

"Well, never mind the D.W.'s point of view. What's yours? You're glad to be there?"

"Oh, darling, *yes*!"

"And you don't miss the family too much?"

"Of course I miss you all dreadfully, but it doesn't make me sad."

"And do you *feel* like Mrs. Tremayne—like a married woman? That must be so extraordinary."

"Well, it's a bit like our tea-parties used to be in the loft—do you remember?—and I sometimes feel it's rather naughty of me to be using the best china. But I shall gradually get used to its being real, I suppose."

"And James?"

Pandora didn't seem to want to discuss James. She squeezed my arm and smiled. I said: "Well, I bet he feels like that, too."

"The thing is——" said Pandora.

"What?"

"I realize now—I never did before——" She hunted for words and I turned and stared at her.

"What *are* you trying to say?"

"I realize now that we're an odd sort of family."

"Well of course we are."

"But I mean—— Oh, Morgan, I *do* want you all to get married too!"

"Five of us? I doubt if even Mrs. Bennet managed as well as that, unless she fell back on a few parsons to help out. However, dearest, we'll do our best."

"But how can you conceivably? It was the most blinding and impossible luck my finding James the way I did."

"It was indeed. But what I can't understand, Pandora, was why Mother didn't—you know, why she didn't——"

For the first time I felt that Pandora's marriage had taught her reserve. She looked troubled and said: "I think I do understand that." Then she hurried on: "But you must see, darling, that you never, any of you, meet any young men, and something's really got to be done about it."

"I met one two days ago," I said proudly.

"I know you did. That was—well, it might be—another bit of impossible luck. But, Morgan, you can't wait about for young men to drop from the sky and then—" she hesitated, not wanting to hurt me, "then surround them."

"Mob them, you mean. We did rather, I suppose. Well, but what else can we do?"

"You ought to meet lots of them, so that they surround you."

"All of us?"

"Oh, darling, do be serious."

"I am really, and I'm sure you're right. Thinking about it in cold blood, our methods are a bit primitive. But there it is, there's nothing to be done."

"Something will simply have to be done. I wish you could see the sort of lives other girls lead." Pandora sighed deeply and unaffectedly. "I shall have to speak to Father."

"That won't do any good."

"He'll say there's plenty of time, won't he? But I don't see how time's going to help."

"Oh, she'll get better some day," I said quickly.

"Morgan, you'll have to rebel sooner or later. Why not come to us and get a job in London?"

I stared at her. "You know I couldn't possibly," I said. "It would be—well, almost murder. Worse in a way."

"Perhaps it wouldn't be as bad as you think. Sooner or later one of you will have to try."

"Not me," I said. "Not till it just happens easily, as it did for you and James. There's always the chance of that, though I still don't see how——"

"Never mind." Pandora looked unhappy and I wished she'd tell me what was on her mind. "There's one other thing, darling," she said. "If ever you *do* suddenly want to get married, I want you to know that I went to see a doctor—a specialist—soon after I met James." I quickened my pace, propelling her with me. I didn't like the sound of this. Pandora looked anxiously into my face. "It's *all*

right, darling! He said there was absolutely *no* reason why we shouldn't all marry and have lots of children."

"Oh," I said, feeling relieved. "Did you tell him everything?"

"Everything I could think of."

"Well, that is good, isn't it? I always meant to marry, but I used to think I'd have to be sterilized or something. (Doesn't it sound horrible? Like a milk bottle.) I thought I could adopt a child or two."

"Well, you can have your own in the normal way."

"It's rather nice to know that, even though I don't know for certain that I'd want to. What about you, darling? Are you longing to have lots of little Jameses?"

"Not at present. I don't want anybody else for a bit, it's such fun being just the two of us. But James is sure I shall want them later on, and then he says he will too." She seemed content to accept James's forecast of her own feelings, and I wondered if I'd ever be such a docile wife myself. I tried to picture Gregory saying: "Some day, my precious, you will want to have children in the old nursery——" But my imagination wasn't quite up to it and I began to laugh.

Pandora looked surprised but not hurt. Dear Pandora is not in the least touchy. "Darling," I said, "I wasn't laughing at you but at the way my imagination rushes off. Anyway, it's nice to know about the doctor. Have you told Thisbe?"

"Yes."

"And Cressida?"

"Well no, I thought you or Thisbe could tell her if she showed any signs of wanting to marry. After all, she's only eighteen."

"All right, we'll do that. And I'm pretty sure Teresa would tell me if she started to worry about it, especially now she's in my room. It's so awfully easy to talk in the dark."

"Awfully easy," agreed Pandora happily.

"Teresa's head is so full of heroism and chivalry that she doesn't think of eugenics noticeably."

"That's another thing. Teresa's education."

"She reads a lot."

"Darling, she's not being educated at all and you know it."

"None of us are educated."

"We big ones aren't as ignorant as poor little Teresa. After all, you were—what? Fifteen—when Miss Foster left——"

"Deadly old bitch."

"Morgan, don't!"

"They all do in novels," I said. "I was trying for your sake not to be odd. Well, I was fifteen, yes, and Cressida was fourteen. You were eighteen."

"But Teresa was only eleven, and we've never had another governess."

"She didn't know much."

"But she did keep us at it. How Mother got away with it when she left I don't know. After all, there *are* education laws."

"But, luckily, if you live in the country, and are fairly upper-class, and very well known in the district, it takes a long time for the inspectors to get on to you."

"Father might have been prosecuted."

"But he wasn't. I believe an inspector did come round once—do you remember?"

"Oh yes, twice!" Pandora began to laugh. "The first time Mother received him lying on the sofa all wound up in a Spanish shawl. She completely hypnotized him with that and her erudite talk (I remember Goethe came into every second sentence, and you *know* she's never read him), and she lied like a trooper——"

"They swear."

"Don't quibble. She said Miss Foster would soon be back, and sent him away happy. It was a wonderful performance."

"I wish I'd been there!"

"And the next time he came Teresa had just scraped past the fifteen-years post."

"So we've been safe for a year. I don't think T. does too badly. Mother supervises her reading, you know."

"I know she did at first, but not so much now, does she?"

"Well, no, perhaps not. I teach her music——"

"I know, darling, but not very regularly."

I sighed. I knew where all this was leading. Pandora had decided in her gentle and inexorable way that poor Teresa ought to be at school. It was a shame, I thought. I said: "Dearest, being married is making you very conventional. You never used to worry about our education."

"I didn't realize quite what anachronisms we all were. It's so extraordinary that you all submit to this—this captivity."

"But we're all frightfully happy," I said. "I can't see that it matters. Have you talked to Thisbe like this?"

"Yes, last night. She came back into my bedroom. She agrees."

I was furious. "Blast Thisbe!" I said. "Look, Pandora, if you go and upset Mother trying to improve our lot, which we're *perfectly* satisfied with——"

"Don't be cross, dearest," said Pandora. "But do try and face facts a little. You're all living in a completely unreal world, and you can't do that for ever."

I can never be really angry with Pandora. I said: "Well, we'll have to stop talking for a minute because here's the Farm. But one thing: can I come and stay with you for a little, to get away from this unreal world of ours?" I was thinking, of course, of Gregory's invitation.

Pandora's slow lovely smile always enchanted me. She said: "Oh *yes*, darling! We *will* have fun," and then we knocked at the back door of the Farm House.

Nice fat Mrs. Fletcher came out in a moment, and went through the usual pantomime of putting a finger to her pursed lips and peering up and down in an exaggerated

way before she led us inside. It was a mature joke between us that some day we should occupy adjoining cells in Wormwood Scrubs. Teresa was all out to smuggle files in to us in hot cross buns, and Cressida was going to sing songs to the head jailer, like the girl in the *Yeomen of the Guard.* I think Pandora's appearance, looking just one of them Harvey girls, and not at all like smart young Mrs. Tremayne down from London, must have been a disappointment to dear Mrs. Fletcher, but she gave us each a bit of barley sugar, another excellent old custom, which she might not have done if Pandora had been all dressed up. Then she produced the butter and eggs in a basket, and I paid for them, and apologized as usual for not bringing a basket of our own, and she tutted and forgave me, and told Pandora she looked very well, and asked lovingly after Mother, whom she had known as a child. We said she was very well and had sent her love, and then we put a lot of scrunched-up newspaper into the basket to hide our illicit purchases and said good-bye. Mrs. Fletcher tiptoed to the gate, looked up and down the road, beckoned to us, and bolted giggling into the house.

"What would you do," asked Pandora as we set off, "if an inspector from the Ministry of Food really *did* appear, after all this joking, and demanded to see what was in that basket?"

"Pray for roses."

Pandora shook her head. "You wouldn't get them, darling. You're not a saint for one thing, and for another that bread she was carrying was all for the deserving poor, none of it for herself."

"This is for Mother!" I protested.

"That won't stop all the rest of us from eating our whack."

"It ought to," I said. "The only reason Father breaks the law is because he thinks Mother really needs the stuff. You know how frightfully scrupulous he is in every other way. Honestly, Pandora, we do try to keep it all for her

but it's no good; she's so frightfully unselfish, it fusses her if we don't have our share."

"All right, darling." Pandora looked at me with what seemed to be amused affection. She stopped and twitched aside some of the newspaper. "Anyway, she couldn't need quite as much as that, there's masses of it. My goodness, if you knew what food's like in London!"

"You must take lots back when you go. I suppose you will be transported with delight to get back to your little house?"

"Yes, I shall hate leaving home and adore going back to—well, to Home."

"Nice," I said.

We strode along in silence for a moment, and I thought how nice that was, too, but of course I could never keep quiet for long and I said: "Are you like one of those women in magazines who plop a dainty little supper out of a few tins every evening for their hubbies? It must be easy and rather fun."

"Oh no, my training hasn't been so wasted; we hardly use tins at all. I think Father's quite right about that."

"Disappointing; I've always wanted to try all those lovely sounding tinned soups."

"You shall, then, but I warn you they all just taste of tinned soup. Father's not half as faddy as I used to think. When would you like to come?"

"Well—oughtn't you and James to be all alone for a bit longer?"

"Of course not, I'm dying to have you all in turn."

"Perhaps Thisbe ought to go first."

"I don't see why. In fact she suggested I should ask you."

I forgave Thisbe for the ski-ing trousers. "That was thoughtful of her."

"She says she's busy on a Sonnet sequence and would lose her grip if she moved at the moment, but I think really you're right and she is being thoughtful. We both feel——"

"What?"

"I was afraid of sounding patronizing, and as if Thisbe and I'd been criticizing you, which we didn't do at all."

"Well, what do you both feel?"

"That a change would do you good."

"I'm terrifically well," I said; "but I'm very glad you think so. A change for me, and school for poor Teresa. What else? What about Cressida?"

"I'm afraid I haven't got as far as her. She's always so busy somehow."

"Yes, she's brilliantly good at cooking, and I'm afraid we let her do more than her share."

"She doesn't seem to mind."

"No, she doesn't, and after all she hasn't anything else to do at this time of year." (Cressida, with spasmodic help from the rest of us, grew vegetables for the market.)

"I shall talk to Father tomorrow about Teresa," said Pandora rather grimly. "It's no good putting it off."

"I wish you wouldn't, Pandora. Poor little T., she would so hate it."

"Yes, I do feel a beast, but honestly, darling, I must do it."

I sighed. "Then it's no good going on talking about it." I was thinking that if by some freakish chance Mother and Father agreed to send Teresa to school, they certainly wouldn't, in the same breath, despatch me with their blessing on a visit to Pandora and James. However, we had planned before, often, and seldom indeed had our plans grown up; it was very unlikely that either Teresa or I would go away at all.

Pandora must have been thinking in the same direction for she said: "If you're not allowed to come up, Morgan, will you rebel?"

"Oh, don't cross bridges, Pandora!"

"But will you, darling? It would be a pity not to get in touch with Gregory before he forgets you. Though of course there are other young men."

"Don't use poor Gregory as a bait. You know I don't need one. And you know I can't promise anything. You've changed, Pandora! I didn't think you would, and I can hardly believe it, but you're—harder, somehow."

Pandora's eyes filled with tears. I stared at her. No one ever looked less hard. "Oh, Morgan, I'm not! I haven't!"

I felt a bully. "I'm sorry, darling," I said. "You're not hard, really, not a scrap. It's just that you've been away and you've got out of touch with—with the way we live. You seem to be arguing against what we've all known and accepted for years, and you never used to argue. Never mind, I know you haven't changed really."

"It's just that my eyes have been opened a bit."

"Opened to some things, perhaps, but blinded to many far more important ones," I said severely.

Pandora sighed. "I wish I could convince you——" she began and then gave it up. "Oh well, it's no good."

"Look," I said. "There were some flowers on that gorse bush two days ago." We hadn't crossed the Common today, but had followed the road along its side. I made a small detour to look at the bush, but the flower was gone. I decided that this was an omen; there was trouble ahead instead of a pleasant surprise. As we came up the slope I looked wistfully at the place where I had first seen the little green car. Of course, it was not there, but how enchanting it would be if Gregory were to reappear at this moment and cheer me up. I had never thought Pandora able to depress me, but I felt thoroughly gloomy today. I said: "I was looking forward to this walk."

Pandora looked sorry. "It was fun, wasn't it, till we disagreed? I always love being with you, Morgan."

"Of course it was fun. The mistake was, we ought to have talked more about you and James and not so much about the Family. Tell me some more, dearest. What are the other people like?"

"Rather lace-curtainy, a lot of them. I think they think

I'm very badly brought up because I don't say pardon and I do say sweat."

"Well, don't let them corrupt you."

"I wouldn't dare. Father'd have something to say."

I stopped at the gate. "Let's go in and say Mrs. Fletcher's been arrested and carted off for interrogation."

"All right. How did *we* get away?"

"She's been tortured but wouldn't disclose our names."

"Oh no, Morgan. You can't joke about that."

"Why not?"

"Because it's real. It truly happens."

"Everyone jokes about Belsen now."

"I wish they wouldn't. It appals me to hear them. I read a thriller the other day, too, which made a lot of play with the most horrible torturing device. The hero escaped unharmed, of course, but there was a footnote to say that the thing had really been used by the Nazis. How *could* anyone make money out of that, by using it in a cheap thriller?"

"There've always been novels about the Inquisition."

"But that was different. The Inquisition really was trying to save people. And it was such a long time ago, Morgan. Surely that does make a difference?"

"Perhaps it does. You're right, Pandora. One shouldn't joke about these things or make capital of them." We kicked off our snowboots, and I added with a sigh: "You take after Father, I think. Sound and wise. Of course he'd say just what you've said, and it seems obvious now, but I never thought of it myself."

"I haven't inherited any of Father's talents," said Pandora. "I wish I had. And I'm not really wise. James is the wise one. Shall we take the things in to Mother?"

We opened the door of the Room and paused in astonishment. In front of the fire stood Father with his back to us. He was draped in a large bath towel, and Thisbe, standing on a stool, was cutting his hair. She seemed to be finding the process painful. In a large armchair, thrown back in an attitude of exaggerated exhaustion and despair,

lay Mother, laughing. "Oh, Thisbe, you've made another great ridge!" she said as we came in.

"Father *dear*!" said Pandora. "Why on earth are you letting them do this to you?"

Father saw us in the looking-glass and made a grimace without turning his head. "I thought this'd be quicker than going down to the shop," he said. "I'll know better another time."

"Look, Mother," said Thisbe. "*That* bit's better, isn't it? Now if I can just get rid of the rat-bitten look along here—turn round please, Father—no, not so far. That's right." She patted him, screwed up her face and made a small clipping movement.

"Let *me* try again, Thisbe," said Mother. "Stand it up with the comb more. That's better. Now let me."

"Surely that's short enough now," said Father.

"Quite short enough, darling, but so tussocky. Is that better, Mother? No, keep still, darling, I've nearly finished."

"Let me have a go!" I said with enthusiasm.

"No, no, *no*!" bellowed Father. When he raises his voice in the Room, the bottles dance on my attic dressing-table. "I've changed horses in midstream twice already."

"Mares, dear," corrected Thisbe.

"But, Father, I feel certain that I could——"

"Go away, Morgan."

Pandora said: "I really do know how, Father."

"So you all say." Father turned to glare at us, and knocked Thisbe off her stool. "Sorry, old thing. I feel," he said, "like an inoffensive bull being stuck full of darts. Of all the incompetent collections of women——"

I adore Father when he means to be angry. I stood on tiptoe and kissed him, which he pretended to hate, wiping it off on the bath towel and saying: "Get away, Morgan, sloppy creature!" His hair, which is red, looked quite indescribable.

"But, Father——" protested Pandora.

"Look at me! Just *look* at me!" said Father. "Lucky I'm not what the Americans call a Socialite. I'd better wall myself up somewhere till it grows long enough to take to a shop."

"Father——"

"Well, Pandora? What insult have you got to heap upon me?"

"Let me——"

"No I will *not* let anyone else have their bit of fun. Have you got Mother's butter and eggs?"

"Yes. Honestly, Father, I——"

"Good. Take them out to the larder then. Grace, you're to eat them all yourself and no cheating."

Mother looked meek. "If you insist, darling." She caught my eye and winked.

"Father," said Pandora. "I do James."

"*What* do you do to poor James?"

"His hair. I cut it."

"You do? Then why on earth aren't you doing mine? Get away, Thisbe, you incapable little slut, and let Pandora have her whack. She can't be any worse than you."

Pandora said: "Well, sit down, darling. Why are you towering up like that? I don't want this silly stool."

"If I sit down I can't see what atrocities you're committing."

"The important thing, Father dear, is that *I* should be able to see. Not you." She gentled him into a chair and got to work. She didn't even tut-tut as she surveyed the stricken field, but set quietly to work to tidy it up.

By lunch-time Father had quite a neat head, and it had only taken him one and a half hours to get it.

CHAPTER III

I DECIDED next morning that I'd neglected my music long enough. Pandora had volunteered to cook the lunch, and Thisbe, Cressida and Teresa all elected to help her. I left the kitchen, with its babble and laughter after a severe effort. It would be all the same if I practised extra tomorrow. No, it would not; I had to make up today for giving myself a holiday yesterday. Thisbe had stuck to her sonnets while I went out with Pandora, and I couldn't allow her art to appear more important than mine. I went into the Room and opened the Bechstein.

Mother was sitting at a table by the window, at work on one of her flower paintings. She has a sensitive and untaught way of using water colours and she does intensely love flowers. Even now, when I've started to haunt the London galleries, I still love Mother's flowers, though I realize that her gift is small and perfect and could never have been enlarged into a great one. A year ago I was certain that she could have been a great artist if she had had the opportunity. I was also certain that I was meant to be a great pianist, just as Thisbe had a fine future before her as a poet.

"You don't mind, darling?" I said as I carefully eased back the heavy lid of the piano.

"I love it," said Mother peacefully. While I loosened up my hands, I watched her across the room. She was blissfully happy, her dark, sunken eyes intent, her lips eager. As I watched, her tongue came out like a child's to help with a fine brush stroke. Mother never uses a pencil; she finds her work is more fluent if she puts the paint on direct. She doesn't pose her flowers either, but lets them fall on to the table and paints them as they lie. Today she had a Christmas rose on a sheet of grey paper and was looking at it with love and hostility.

I ought to have been practising a Chopin nocturne, a difficult thing that meant a lot of patient work over a few bars before I should be able to play it the way I felt it. But I was too happy this morning to spend half an hour in educating my fingers, by repetition, to find the right notes for me; and instead I went straight into a Beethoven sonata which I know by heart. My fingers know it by heart too, so that I could think about the music, not the notes. The mistakes that I still made in the faster movement, where I scrambled through one or two passages that should have been clear as water drops, were so familiar that I'd almost stopped worrying about them. I watched the keyboard, as I'd been taught, because that never distracts one's thoughts, and I was deep in the music yet conscious of Mother listening, so that my playing was a present to her, and was thus enriched.

I was playing the last movement when Pandora came in, still wearing her cooking apron. I found afterwards that she had left her team of helpers at work on the lunch. I thought she had come to listen to the sonata, and felt happier than ever. She stood by the fire till I had finished, and when I looked up she was still standing there, head bent, and with a withdrawn look. I felt suddenly uneasy. Mother went on painting. Pandora lifted her head and looked across at her; a searching, gentle, inexorable glance Oh Lord, I thought, not now. Not just when Mother's so happy and peaceful. It would be too cruel to upset her now. I tried to signal to Pandora but she didn't take any notice. Then I tried to start playing again, but I was so nervous that when I plunged into a Brahms waltz my brain blocked the messages my fingers sent up and made them play wrong notes. (Well, it felt like that.) I stopped, on a discord, and Mother looked up: "What's the matter, darling?"

Then she met Pandora's eyes and her own grew wary. The withdrawn expression came on to her face, too; for a moment she and Pandora looked astonishingly alike.

"Mother," said Pandora mildly, "this seems a good moment to have a word with you, if I'm not interrupting."

"Not at all," said Mother politely, pushing away her painting things. The happiness had quite left her face.

"Pandora—I'm trying to practise!" I said feebly.

"Sorry, darling, we shan't be long."

"What is it, Pandora?" Mother sat upright, her veined hands folded on the table. She was alarmingly dignified.

Pandora cleared her throat. "It's about Teresa," she said. "I'm not quite happy about her. I think she's lonely and"—she moistened her lips—"and I think she's growing up ignorant."

"Indeed?" Mother was beginning to look dangerous. Her hands came apart and began to beat softly on the table top.

"You've often said, Mother, that she should go to school in a year or two. You've been saying it now for four years, ever since Miss Foster left."

"I still say it, Pandora."

"But when? She's fifteen now and it will be terribly hard for her to catch up with the other children. Next year it will be harder still."

Mother's eyes shone, patches of colour were creeping into her thin cheeks. From a beautiful stone woman she was being changed to a live one. I couldn't take my eyes off her, she was so lovely, but I was beginning to feel horribly sick. I knew, and Pandora knew, what it meant. "For heaven's sake——" I said.

Mother was breathing quickly. She looked at Pandora with naked hostility. Neither of them took any notice of me. Mother said: "I have borne five children, Pandora, and by this time I know how to take care of them. *No one* else knows that as well as I do. But call Teresa, if you wish. Ask her what she would like to do. If she says she wants to go to school, I will let her go, even if it should"—she dropped her voice almost to a whisper—"break me."

I began to sidle towards the door. Oh, why didn't Pan-

dora stop? She showed no signs of giving in. She said: "It wouldn't break you, Mother, but you know she'd never choose to go. She ought to be forced."

"Is that all you have to say, Pandora?" Mother's voice was climbing now; in another moment it would be shrill.

My cold hand fumbled with the door. I got it open and backed through. As I closed it, I heard Pandora say calmly: "Oh no, I haven't finished yet." I turned and rushed upstairs.

Father was writing. I fell down the steps into his room.

"Father!" I said, "please come. Pandora and Mother. In the Room."

Father jumped straight up and hurried downstairs. He's a big man and the house quaked. Mother was talking when we came into the Room and she didn't seem to have got any worse. She was saying: "—I can hardly believe it of you, Pandora."

"I can hardly believe it either," said Father. "Anything you have to say, Pandora, you can come upstairs and say to me." He went over to Mother and put his arm round her. "It's all right, my little love," he said. "I'm here."

Mother put her face against his broad chest. Pandora and I went out of the room. She was pale and trying not to cry. "Now I suppose Father hates me," she said.

"Not for long."

"And you do, too, Morgan. Oh, why can't you see ——"

"I don't hate you, I just think you're making a big mistake."

"It's all so awful," said Pandora. "Oh, I wish James was here."

"It wouldn't be in the least awful if you'd just let well alone," I said. "I've told you before, we're all perfectly happy."

Pandora blew her nose; she was using terrific self-control. We backed into the dining-room as Father and Mother came out into the hall and went upstairs. Mother's eyes were shut and she was crying quietly. Father was holding her tightly; he took her upstairs and we heard them go into her room. "I expect she'll stay in bed for the rest of the day," I said.

"Father will want to talk to me," said Pandora. "Let me know when he calls, Morgan; I'm going back to the kitchen." She went along the back passage with her head very high.

I hung about waiting for Father; I didn't think he'd be with Mother for very long, as she was sure to take one of her tablets and go to sleep. I went up to the turn of the stairs, where there was a window with a comfortable sill. Sitting there I gradually grew calmer. I could see down to the looking-glass at the foot of the stairs, and up to the landing, with the door to Father's dressing-room. Or I could turn and look out—and this was more comforting—at the big cedar tree, and down the long garden with its beds quite bare of flowers; at the wintry countryside and the cold sky. Not far away, a waterworks was generally deplored as spoiling the view with its tall brick chimney. I should have missed that chimney terribly if anything had happened to it, and I used to worry about it during the air raids. I had an even better view of it from my attic.

The queer thing was that I felt so awfully sorry for Pandora. Although I disagreed utterly with what she'd done, I didn't feel I could leave her to face Father's wrath all alone; I should have to go with her, blast it. When Mother's door opened and shut softly and Father came to the head of the stairs and said: "Where's Pandora?" I said: "I'll fetch her," and added: "She didn't mean to, Father." He didn't answer that but went into his dressing-room, and I ran down to call Pandora.

We came slowly upstairs together, and as we came to Father's door, she gave me a look of appeal which I

answered by squeezing her arm. Then she knocked and we went in.

Father's dressing-room is small and sunny and it also looks over the garden. It is exactly below my bedroom, and I like to savour the slight difference between our two views. For him the trees near at hand rise up, blocking out the distance and shouldering into the sky. To me the land is further unrolled, and I can see, over the far end of the garden and young orchard, the railway and the canal going by together. Then comes the waterworks, and at the top of the slow rise, the main road gleams for an instant and is gone. I can also see the cars passing just beyond our garden wall, and moreover I have a bigger sky than Father's. Admittedly, he has a second window, a small leaded casement on the side of the house farthest from the road. This has its charm too, looking over the yard and old buildings, and across the fields to the distant spire of Wools church. But I wouldn't swop my extra inch of countryside for all Father's second window.

Father has never, as far as I know, dressed in his dressing-room, although he does keep some of his clothes there. It is really his work-room or study, and I suppose a less perverse family would have changed its name. As usual, today it was piled with papers, and the typewriter was open on the solid table.

On the wall he had pinned a vast chart, neatly ruled with horizontal and vertical lines. Down the left side were the names of those characters in his current book who had been near the scene of the crime, and across the top the pertinent hours were marked off, five minutes to a column, occasionally sub-divided down to as little as one minute. In the ruled squares the movements of each character at every moment were neatly written in red ink.

I always find it fascinating to watch the evolution of Father's stories from the beginnings, with all the lies,

counter-lies, investigations and setbacks, while all the time on Father's wall the true movements of the murderer can be followed. "(1.47) Shoots. Examines body. (1.48) Wipes gun with handkerchief. Handkerchief into pocket. (1.49) Throws gun into shrubbery. Removes gloves. (1.50) Picks up telephone and dials," and so on. There might be a footnote to an entry: "(*N.B.* Gloves large. Easy remove.)" Although he uses a lot of abbreviations, he is so neat that I can understand the chart at a glance, and I often wish he would present one to a museum or something, as they are so interesting. They're like the score of a Bach fugue, where the duration of every note must be timed to a split-second, or make the whole meaningless.

Father has long departed from the Holmes manner of his early novels. He says regretfully that they were more restful than falling off a log. No one criticized the deductions of his detective (an artist of aristocratic lineage, given to high-flown rhetoric); his reading of every clue, however improbable, always proved correct. One clue, one interpretation (Father says), and you kept the story moving too fast for anyone to object. Those were the days, he says, but though he sighs I know that he really glories in the complex analytical work of his new detective (the artist's son); a very human figure who seldom now needs help from the pompous old artist. In fact, Father is longing to kill the old man off, but of course his publishers won't allow it.

Today I was naturally far too rattled to look at the chart or out of the window. Pandora and I stood together just inside the door and Father walked up and down.

He started fairly gently: "What's all this about Teresa?" he said.

"I think she's leading an unnatural life, Father."

"In what way unnatural?"

"She's completely cut off from people of her own age, and she never plays any games and she's not being educated."

"As far as I know neither education nor the playing of

games is natural," said Father conclusively. "In what way unhealthy?"

Pandora began to stammer: "I—I've said already——"

"You've said she plays no games. Whose fault is that?"

"I don't know, Father," said Pandora, and added bravely: "Yours, I think."

"*Mine?*" Father's considerable eyebrows—red streaked with grey—drew together.

"For keeping her at home."

"I don't stop her playing games. In fact I've always encouraged her to." He turned to me. "Morgan, my dear, I rely on you to play more games with Teresa. Thisbe and Cressida will help, of course."

"What sort of games, Father?" I hoped he would suggest something impossible.

But Father gave his mind to the question for about twenty seconds and then said: "French cricket." There didn't seem to be any answer to that.

Father turned back to Pandora. "I quite agree," he said, "that it's a pity there are not many children living near here, but I daresay Teresa will get to know some more as time goes on." I looked at Pandora but she didn't make the obvious reply. Then Father came down suddenly to facts. "As it happens," he said, "I think myself that it would be an advantage to Teresa to go to school. I've thought it for a long time, and I thought it of all of you big ones too, in your time. But I ask you, Pandora, how you could possibly persist in urging such a thing when you saw how the mere suggestion was upsetting your Mother? You know—you've known for years—what very serious consequences might come of an upset to her. You know what Doctor Gerard has said about her."

Pandora made herself as tall as she could. "Father," she said shakily, "dear Doctor G. isn't a mental specialist."

Father turned his back and looked out of the window; he was frightfully upset I could see. "Oh, Pandora, stop!" I

whispered, but she didn't answer. After a moment Father spoke, without turning round.

"Doctor Gerard," he said very quietly, "has known your Mother almost all her life. He is a man of wide experience and deep human sympathy, and he considers her to be perfectly all right provided she is not unduly upset." He paused for a moment. "Do you realize what you're asking, Pandora? Are you seriously suggesting that I should call in specialists to pry into her private thoughts and feelings? That is a humiliation to which I will *not* have her subjected. They might even—they might even want to take her away to some sort of Home, so-called." He turned round to face us. His blue eyes looked hurt, and Pandora and I were trying not to cry. "There, my dear," he said, "I know you didn't mean it, but for God's sake, Pandora, come to *me* another time."

Pandora said: "I'm sorry, Father."

He came over and took an arm of us each. "Good children," he said. "I appreciate the effort you've made, Pandora, mistaken as it was. Do trust me to do my best for Teresa. After all, I've had this worry to think about for years, and for you all."

He kissed us both and pushed us out of the room. "Oh dear," said Pandora, "I thought he'd shout at me. This was much worse."

I nodded and we both wiped our eyes furtively, looking away from each other. "The trouble is," said Pandora, "that I'm not really sorry, at least not in the way he thinks I am. I haven't said half the things I meant to."

"Oh, never mind now, Pandora, for goodness' sake don't start up again. Let's see how the lunch is getting on."

So we went downstairs and along to the kitchen, where Thisbe and Cressida were now cleaning the silver. Thisbe looked at us rather sharply when we came in, but we didn't say anything. We were both, I believe, thankful to find a job awaiting us. There's a lot of silver, and it kept the four of us busy until lunch-time.

CHAPTER IV

PANDORA'S efforts had not been as fruitless as she feared. Next morning Father called us all into Mother's room after breakfast to discuss Teresa's education. Mother was just finishing her coffee, and Teresa instantly got on to her bed and sat as close to her as possible for protection. The rest of us sat where we could, and Father stood by the fire (which he always lighted early in cold weather), filling his pipe and looking benign.

Mother was wearing a blue shawl which I could remember back into my childhood. She looked very well, and her hair was so smooth that I think Father had been brushing it, a thing they both exceedingly enjoyed. She leaned back against her piled pillows and smiled at us, although I noticed that she didn't look at Pandora.

Father said: "Teresa, dear, Mother and I have been talking about your lessons; we don't want you to grow up an ignoramus. Do you think you *are* an ignoramus?" He made a face at her. Father is always inclined to treat Teresa as quite a small child.

Teresa said hurriedly: "Oh no, Father, I really don't think so."

"Still not keen to go to school, eh?"

Teresa clutched Mother's hand for reassurance. Her blue eyes were terrified. "Oh no, Daddy. Please!" She is the only person who ever uses "Daddy" and "Mummy," and I think she resorts to it when she unconsciously wants to be considered a baby. Mother squeezed her hand but said nothing.

"Well," said Father, "we won't send you away this time, chicken, but we really must do something about getting some knowledge into that thick head of yours. How would you like to have some French lessons at the Convent? *Parly voo*, h'm?"

Father can speak quite good French when he likes. Teresa said sedately: "I don't think you need to bother about my French. I know it perfectly well. I read a *lot* of French."

"*Les Malheurs de Sophie*, eh?"

"Oh no," said Teresa with dignity, "I'm reading *Du côté de chez Swann* at the moment."

Her accent was quite indescribable. Father's eyebrows jumped; one way and another he was momentarily speechless. Then he said: "How are you getting on with it?" And Teresa answered: "It's queer, and I find it a bit slow."

"Yes, well," Father thought for a minute, then he said: "French at the Convent. What about English?"

I said: "She reads such a lot, I don't think you need worry about her English."

"Mostly trash, I expect. What are you reading at present?"

"*A Dowager Dies*," said Teresa, smiling. This was either very clever or stupendously lucky of Teresa, I shall never be sure which. Father's eyebrows stopped darting about, and he tried not to look pleased.

"Well," he said, "don't forget it was the first attempt." He turned to Thisbe. "Look here, Thisbe, you're to be responsible for her English, poetry and so on."

"All right, Father."

"Morgan, you teach her the piano already. Keep it up, child, and don't get slack."

"All right."

"Cressida, you'd better teach her to cook."

"All right, Father."

"There now, Teresa, I know your Mother will want to teach you painting and sewing herself, won't you, Grace? Now, be a good girl, chicken, and learn lots."

"I'll try, Daddy." Teresa fixed her eyes beseechingly on his face. "Couldn't *you* teach me French? I'd learn much more from you than I would from a nun."

"I? Lord no, *I* can't speak French, never could. Now it's

no good wheedling, T.," he added, as she started to speak, "just you be thankful it's no worse."

"I am," she said sincerely. "O.K., I'll do my best."

"*What* did I hear you say? Did you all hear that, or am I dreaming? Now listen to me, young woman; if ever I hear you say 'O.K.' again, I won't send you to school, I'll send you to *Borstal*!"

Teresa, on her way to the door, smiled kindly at him. "All right, darling, I'll remember." I followed her out on to the landing and she seized my two hands and spun me round on the polished oilcloth: "Oh, Morgan! A *happy* thing! Do you realize he never mentioned sums?"

Father felt quite contented about Teresa now, and on his way to his dressing-room he shouted at me not to forget about French cricket. Then he disappeared until lunch-time, and I heard his typewriter rapping pretty continuously, so the book must have been going well. Cressida took Teresa off for a cooking lesson while Thisbe and I washed up the breakfast things and Pandora did the Room. (Mrs. Phillips did most of the actual cleaning in our house, but we were responsible for the Room and for our own bedrooms.) Mother came down soon after eleven and we all had tea. Thisbe took a cup up to Father, and said he never knew he was drinking it. And then I took Teresa off for her music lesson.

As usual, when I'd neglected her for a few weeks, I was pleasantly surprised by Teresa's playing. She is a sensitive little thing, and hardly ever vulgarizes, although of course her fingers were clumsy from lack of practice. I tried to persuade her to work for an hour and a half every day, and I said we'd have a lesson twice a week. But although she promised, I think we both felt doubts of our own staying-power. I enjoyed the lesson, particularly when Teresa coaxed me on to the stool to play to her. I was always far too willing to play myself instead of keeping her at it.

At twelve o'clock Thisbe came in and said: "Time for your English lesson, young T. We'll do it by the kitchen fire, it's warmer there." They went off together, and after a minute I decided to take my mending in and listen to the lesson while I sewed. I very seldom mend my clothes at all. When they are past the safety-pin stage, I throw them into my bottom drawer and try to forget about them. But after a month or two, they begin to rear their ugly heads and then I have a few days of wrath when I work grimly through the whole lot. I was still hoping to go and stay with Pandora, and so this seemed a fitting moment to start on days of wrath; my pangs would be partly alleviated by Teresa's English lesson, I thought.

Pandora and Cressida seemed to have had the same idea, for the kitchen was full of work baskets and Thisbe had to talk above a mutter of "Scissors, please" and "Have you any blue cotton?", but it didn't seem to worry her.

She started off by reading a short very moving poem which was a translation, she said, from someone called Rilke. She had cut it out of the *Listener* and after she'd read it, she and Teresa discussed it for a bit and Thisbe gave it to her to copy into a book. Then Thisbe said, "Now we'll play a game," and we all looked up.

"We're each going to have a noun given to us at random out of the dictionary," said Thisbe; "and one of the audience will ask us each a question. Then we're given five minutes to write a poem answering the question and bringing in the noun."

"Oh that's a good game," said Cressida. "Can we all join in?"

"Yes, can we?" said Pandora and I.

"Certainly not. Only those whose names start with T are eligible." Thisbe passed me the dictionary. "A noun for Teresa, please. Got a pencil, darling?"

Teresa nodded and I glanced through the pages. It was funny how few nouns there seemed to be—I kept finding words like unpredictable and constipated—but in the end

I gave Teresa "engine" and Thisbe "breakfast." Then Cressida asked Thisbe, "Who killed Cock Robin?" and Pandora asked Teresa: "Will ye no' come back again," and I took the time, and they started.

There was a good deal of groaning at first from Teresa, and they both frowned into the fire and wrote a few words and crossed them out, and then suddenly, almost at the same moment, they both started to write quite confidently, and when I said "Time!" they were obviously making minor corrections.

"Yours first, darling," said Thisbe.

Teresa looked shy, and giggled rather, then she cleared her throat and said:

"The gallant knight was urging on his steed
And as he rode
He sang a lilting ditty 'neath his breath
Along the road.
'Ah tarra lirra, lady mine,
Mefears thou art a concubine!'
At last, arriving at a bosky wood,
He dismounted,
And laying by his sword—engine of war—
He sighed and said:
'Ah tarra lirra, lady dear,
I'll ne'er come back to thee, I fear!' "

We all laughed at that, but really we were very much impressed. I knew I couldn't have done it in half an hour, let alone five minutes, and Pandora and Cressida said the same.

Thisbe felt it her duty to criticize. She said it was dam' good, but a sword was not an engine, and so Teresa had cheated.

"I know," said Teresa. "I was going to make it an arquebus, or something, but it wouldn't scan."

"I suspect," said Thisbe, "that an arquebus would be an anachronism."

"Yes, I wondered about that too. What *is* an arquebus?"

No one knew, though we agreed it was some sort of gun. I said I'd look it up, but the dictionary only said "See har," so I turned, in astonishment, to "harquebus," and there it was: "Portable gun supported on tripod by hook or on forked rest."

"It doesn't say what century," I said, "but it does say (hist). Anyway, I rather liked sword, it's much more in keeping with a knight."

Thisbe said it was still cheating, but I could see that she thought Teresa very bright. None of us commented on the rather unsuitable introduction of the word concubine.

Then Thisbe read her poem, and I was rather disappointed because she does write so beautifully and I was unreasonable enough to expect something stirring and precious. It wasn't bad though.

"Who killed Cock Robin? Breakfast.

"*Miss Cressida's Mamma one day*
Called to her little one at play.
'See here, my love, what naughty Puss
Has done to this poor little thrush.'
'Alas Mama!' cried Cressida
While tears ran down her neck and ear,
'It was not Pussy, it was I,
Who at the bird a stone did shy.'
'My little one,' Mama said then,
'Your conduct me has filled with pain,
And to be sure you'll sin no more
I hereby lock your bedroom door
And you shall very hungry be
Without your breakfast, lunch or tea.'
Alone, Miss Cressida did sigh:
'Another time I'll tell a lie.' "

Thisbe's personality is such that for a moment none of us noticed her flagrant breach of the rules of the game. We all murmured appreciatively, and Teresa said wistfully: "Oh, darling, you *are* clever!"

But something about her smile, a hint of villainy in her dark eyes, put me on my guard, just as Teresa said: "May I look?" and read the poem through to herself. Then we both spoke together.

"But look here, Thisbe——"

"Thisbe, you cheat——"

"What's the matter?" cried Pandora, and Cressida snatched the poem from Teresa and studied it.

Thisbe swaggered over to the door, hands in the pockets of her slacks. She waited until the storm of abuse was lulled, and then said with dignity: "You realize, of course, that I sacrificed my professional integrity purely in order to give my pupil an intelligence test, a thing that the rest of you would not understand. You didn't do badly, Teresa, but you might have been on to it a *leetle* bit quicker, so now, as a punishment, I want you to write a short essay on the differences to be observed between a robin and a thrush." She left the room, humming a little tune and looking intolerably self-satisfied, and Teresa said: "I will do no such thing!" But we talked her round, poor child, and left her scowling over an exercise book. Teresa is no more interested than the rest of us in natural history, and when she'd exhausted the redness and the speckles, I knew she'd be stuck. She's a resourceful little thing, however, and she turned to the *Oxford Book of English Verse.* By lunch-time she'd produced quite a respectable little essay, bringing in "The red-breast whistles from the garden croft" (Keats), "Another thrush may there rehearse, the madrigals which sweetest are" (E. B. Browning), and of course "That's the wise thrush" etc., by Browning himself. She said she could have found lots more if Tennyson hadn't distracted her.

We reported progress to Father at lunch-time, and then

wished we hadn't, because he said: "And what about games?" We'd all managed to forget about the French cricket, and we must have looked as depressed as we felt, because Father told us kindly that we could vary it with rounders. Lunch-time became a dismal meal for every one except Father, who was in excellent spirits. Mother was rather silent, as she usually is, but she pleased us all by eating a good lunch.

As it was Thursday, Mrs. Phillips came back to wash up the lunch things and we were able to relax for a time by the fire in the Room. Father went straight back to work and I made an unworthy but determined effort to forget about games, and even fetched my mending from the kitchen in the hope that my nobility might bring down the rain of which the sky was clearly full. But at half-past two, Pandora, as eldest sister, said quietly: "Come on, all of you, games."

"*Not* just now," pleaded Teresa, who, once started on the *Oxford Book*, could not relinquish it, and was now absorbed in "The Song of the Lotus Eaters."

"Yes now, I'm afraid," said Pandora, and we all groaned and got up.

"Have fun, darlings," said Mother peacefully but with just a hint of malice as she put her feet on the fender and leant back in her big chair. "I may come out to watch you later on."

Muttering and grumbling, we went up to our several rooms for thick jerseys, scarves and gloves. We all wore our snowboots, although they are not built for agility, and we went out into the dripping garden and squelched down the long straight path to the tennis lawn.

This was once a well-kept court, and I have seen photographs of Father and Mother, in white flannels and pleated skirt, entertaining their friends here on Sunday afternoons. Thisbe and Pandora say they remember these parties well, and how they used to hide in the bushes and spy upon the guests, though why Thisbe should remember, when she's

only a year older than me, I don't know. I suspect that she's heard about it so often from Pandora that she thinks she remembers. Pandora says that there was always home-made lemonade in dear little pink tumblers (there are still a few of them left on the top pantry shelf) and that she and Thisbe used sometimes to emerge covered with dirt and scratches from their jungle retreat and come and shake hands for the sake of a drink. Mother never minded how dirty and torn they were, but was always proud of them so long as they were polite. Then at six o'clock Nanny used to ring a bell outside the kitchen window, and that meant they had to go to bed. They used to grumble and pout, and once a lady in a grey silk dress, who didn't play tennis but came to watch, said: "Oh, how *lucky* you are! I wish someone would ring a bell when it was time for *me* to go to bed!" Pandora thought then, and thinks still, that this was one of the most false and fatuous remarks ever made by a grown-up to a child. She says she wishes she had answered rudely, but she was too well brought up. We're not at all well brought up now, but apparently we were when we were small.

The lawn is mostly plantains and daisies now, with a certain amount of grass and clover in between. But it still looks pleasant in the summer, when Father or Phillips have just mown it. Today it was a bog, after all that snow, and the five shallow stone steps that lead down to it from the flower garden were green and slippery. "We shall make an awful mess of the lawn," said Cressida.

"Good," said Thisbe. "If it looks like a car-park at a point-to-point when we've finished, we may be forbidden ever to play on it again."

We stood in a forlorn circle and argued about the rules of French cricket. There are not many rules, but Pandora said that you might not move your feet when you were batting, and if the ball went behind you, so much the worse for you. Thisbe said that was nonsense, you could jump round to face the bowling if you were quick enough,

but of course you couldn't move when you were being bowled at. Cressida sided with Thisbe. I had never played French cricket, but it was dull listening in silence, so after a bit I chipped in on Pandora's side with such enthusiasm that, to my surprise, we routed the other two, who agreed to try our way and see how it went.

Thisbe handed the "bat," a piece of board, to the shrinking Teresa. "You're in first, my love."

It is never easy for a fat person to look pathetic, but poor Teresa, as she took the bat, looked positively tragic. She stood in a little sea of mud, holding the bat in her gloved hands and looking fearfully around at her tormentors. Cressida bowled her, first ball.

Pandora went in next and batted competently but without distinction, amassing an adequate score. Then Thisbe, who hit two boundaries, was bowled. Then it was my turn, and so eager was I to get the largest possible number of runs from my fifth feeble stroke, that I hit my shin a sharp blow and, hopping with pain, was disqualified for moving my feet.

Cressida astonished us all by proving a champion. She sent the ball exactly where she wished, so that the inexpert fielders, fumbling in their cold went gloves, never got close to her, and it wasn't until Thisbe cheated—bowling a deliberate wide out of Cressida's reach, which was caught by Pandora—that she could be attacked in the rear and bowled.

All of us except Teresa were by this time taking a sort of morbid pleasure in the game, but she, blue with cold, clumsy, cross and almost static, was patently deriving no good whatever from her loving sisters' exertions. When Mother appeared on the steps to watch her children at play, Teresa, who was having her third unsuccessful innings, hurled the bat from her (it narrowly missed my head) and ran to her, slipping in her boots. "Oh, Mother, *can't* we stop now? We've been here for hours and I'm so cold, and the ball's wet and disgusting."

"Darling, you're quite purple!" said Mother. "Would you like to come to the post with me, to get warm?"

Teresa beamed. "I'm going for a walk with Mother," she called over her shoulder; Mother waved, and the two of them walked quickly away up the garden.

"*Well——!*" said Cressida. We stared at each other and laughed.

"Now we can go in," I said, picking up the bat.

"Thank heaven for that," said Pandora.

"Yes indeed," said Thisbe. She threw the ball from hand to hand, and looked sideways at us. "Shall we," she said, "just finish the innings?"

I hadn't had the courage to suggest it myself, but I agreed at once, and so did the others. We didn't miss Teresa at all, and when she came back from her walk, pink and contented, I looked round at the others and decided that they looked pink and contented too. Her reappearance stopped the game, however. We really could not go on under her flabbergasted eyes. With an assumption of boredom, we trooped up the garden, trying to imply that we had been waiting for her to come back, but of course if she didn't want to play, heaven knew nor did we.

At tea-time Father said, with perfect truth, that we all looked the better for our fresh air and exercise. Sitting by the fire, eating Mother's delectable scones, I wondered how I could possibly have enjoyed running about on a muddy lawn after a revoltingly wet tennis ball. It was not an experiment I wanted to repeat, but there was no denying that it had been fun at the time.

"Tomorrow," said Father, beaming over his glasses and under his eyebrows, "you had better try rounders. I might even spare half-an-hour to come and join you."

None of us opposed him, not even Teresa. We made welcoming noises, and hoped that he would forget all about it, as indeed he did. That was the first and last time that we played games with our youngest sister; it was never suggested again.

CHAPTER V

A COINCIDENCE happened a few days later. We were gloomily discussing old Uncle Gregory when a car drove up (the gate, for once being open) and Gregory Manning got out of it. We rarely worried about our ancient uncle, and as it happened I was making a sort of counterpoint to the main theme by telling Pandora that while he represented the physical type proper to the name, one could, if one tried hard enough, make the same three syllables conjure up a different, and vastly superior, image.

Uncle Gregory wasn't a real uncle, thank heaven, but only an uncle-in-law. He was the widower of Mother's elder sister Agnes, who brought her up in this very house, after their parents died, with a selfless adoration few mothers could give. Father always says that Mother only married him because she missed Agnes so dreadfully, but he doesn't mean it unkindly.

When my grandparents died the house was left to the two daughters equally, and they lived there—plus, for a year or two, Gregory—until Aunt Agnes died. When Mother married, Gregory took himself off, although Agnes's share of the house was his for life. Father paid him interest, or rent or something, for his half share, but he still felt entitled to come and stay whenever he wished, and to snoop around, criticizing. Luckily he found us rather an exhausting family, otherwise he would always have been with us, as Mother's loyalty to Aunt Agnes made her fearfully kind, and in some strange way she looked up to him.

His letter came by the second post, just as we were finishing tea. I heard the little postman come whistling up the path, and then the click of the slit closing, and the plop of a letter on to the boards. I had an unreasoning conviction that there was great and exciting news lying on the hall floor (it was one of those moments when I was sure

I was psychic), and I walked out of the Room with elaborate calm to fetch the letter. I picked it up in the dusk, and when I got it into the lighted Room I found it was only from Uncle Gregory.

Mother read it and said: "Gregory would like to come and stay next month."

There was a spontaneous groan from all her daughters except Teresa, who was reading. "Does he say please?" asked Cressida.

"No, he proposes."

"Rude little——" but Mother shook her head, and Cressida subsided.

It was then that the two conversations ran along together, and then that the green car stopped outside the windows. I jumped up, delighted, but feeling Pandora's eye on me, and remembering what she said about surrounding young men, I sat down again with forced dignity, and let Cressida go to the door. As she went she glanced anxiously round the big Room, but there were no wet stockings and it was looking very pretty with the shaded lamps and Mother's first bowls of hyacinths, blue and white. It was unfortunate, however, that Thisbe had washed her hair and was bristling like a cheese-grater with the aluminium things hairdressers use to make waves. She looked round wildly for a way of escape, as Cressida left the room, and cried: "Wait, Cress!" But it was too late and Cressida didn't hear her. There is only one door, and there was no time to get a window open, even if it hadn't been raining. She started to pull the wavers out as fast as she could, and had half of them in her lap when Cressida brought Gregory in. She then clasped her hands and sat still, very upright, with one side of her head still full of metal and the other set in tight, wet, little black ridges. When Gregory, politely greeting us each in turn, came to her, she made a forbidding little bow without speaking, and directly he had turned away, her hand shot up and came away with another waver. Only four left now.

Gregory was being introduced to Pandora, and from Cressida's manner of presenting him, anyone would have thought him her discovery, not mine. She piloted him round by the elbow, speaking in a very Society voice ("Pandora, may I introduce Mr. Manning to you?—my elder sister, Mrs. Tremayne"). And she told Teresa sharply to wake up and say how d'you do.

Teresa looked up from her book, smiled very sweetly and waited to see if Gregory wanted to speak to her. (One more waver went down on to Thisbe's lap.) Apparently he had nothing to say, and she went back to her book.

Gregory refused tea and sat down by Mother, clearly determined to make himself agreeable. I found it rather hard to sit still and quiet, but I was buoyed up by the knowledge that *my* hair curled naturally, and that I happened to be trying out a new lip-stick. Gregory's expression had convinced me that it was a becoming colour.

"Are you on your way to London again, Mr. Manning?" said Mother.

Gregory said he was, and that Morgan had told him to look in again when he was passing, and he hoped Mrs. Harvey didn't mind.

Mother's eyes rested on me rather expressionlessly for a moment and she didn't answer him, but Cressida filled the gap by saying anxiously: "Of course we're delighted to see you at any time." (Thisbe, with visible pain, extracted another waver, and with it a good deal of hair. Only two to go.)

Gregory cleared his throat nervously and hitched up the knees of his trousers. He was wearing suède shoes, and I saw Mother's eyes fixed upon them in disgust. Cressida gave him a cigarette, and Thisbe got rid of another waver. Pandora, with admirable *savoir-faire*, began to speak of the London theatres, and he looked grateful and found his tongue. I could see that Pandora, sitting still in a low chair and slowly, comfortably talking platitudes, had the reassuring normalcy that Cressida tried so hard to achieve.

I resolved, not for the first time, to model myself on Pandora.

All the same I wished that she would change the subject. If Gregory mentioned that he had invited me to a play I should never be allowed to stay with Pandora, and it seemed to me quite certain that he would mention a fact of such interest to the whole family. I came over for a cigarette, and sat on the floor by Pandora. Surely this was not surrounding?

Gregory lit my cigarette, and Thisbe took out the last waver. Her lips, which had been pressed into a straight line, softened, and she gave a little sigh.

Mother stood up, staggering slightly, and pushing a heavy lock of hair back from her forehead. "You must excuse me, Mr. Manning, if I go and lie down now," she said, and her voice was achingly weary.

Gregory sprung up to hold the door for her, and she bowed slightly as she passed him, and went away. I must admit that the atmosphere lightened.

"Poor Gregory, your sleeve's all wet," said Cressida, rather possessively I thought.

"So it is!" I exclaimed. "Come on, take it off and I'll get it dry." I took his jacket from him (it was a nice smelly tweed) and was taking it off to the kitchen when he stopped me in alarm. "Thanks awfully, Morgan," he said, "but I shall have to be getting along soon."

"But you've only just arrived!"

"It's such a filthy night, Gregory, you may just as well stay and get dry."

Thisbe, who had now rammed all the wavers down the side of her chair and was ready for action, joined in to say: "Father will be coming down soon and we'll have a drink."

And to my astonishment, Pandora, she who had advocated reserve, said: "The best plan will be for Mr. Manning to have an early supper with us, and give the rain time to stop."

I could hardly believe it! We *never* had anyone to supper,

let alone a young man, and it was most unlike Pandora to suggest such an innovation. Beautiful as it would be to have Gregory with us for an hour or two I hoped that he would refuse, as I dared not imagine what the repercussions might be. He didn't seem overwhelmed, however, by Pandora's reckless hospitality. Anyone might have thought that invitations to supper were commonplace happenings, if they'd heard him accept with pleasure, and hope that he would not be eating our rations.

At these last courteous words, I realized the enormity of what Pandora had done. She knew perfectly well that we didn't *have* supper. When we felt hungry we would wander out, individually, to the larder, and come back munching a piece of treacle tart, or a cold fish cake over from breakfast, or carrying a cup of cocoa with a slice of cake in the saucer. Father always had a glass of milk and a hunk of bread and cheese, and if there were any jam tarts we used to give them all to him, and he would eat six or seven, one tart one mouthful. Mother never had anything but soup, made by one of us in the morning.

I was still holding Gregory's wet jacket, and I walked out of the Room, looking, said Pandora when she joined me, like Lady Macbeth. We stood in the kitchen and searched each other's faces for help and guidance.

"Well!" said Pandora at last. "I've brought this upon us, and now we'd better do something. You should have seen poor Cressida's face when I followed you out of the Room. She was so stiff with horror that she was suspended about half an inch above her chair, like Saint Teresa!"

That made me laugh, and I felt better. Pandora never takes things tragically and I was glad it was she, not Cressida, who had come to help me. "Let's see what we've got," I said.

We went into the larder and examined Mother's soup. There was a jugful, meant to last her for two days, and we instantly tipped it into a saucepan and began to add to it anything we could lay hands on—the gravy from an old

stew, some vegetable water saved by the thrifty Cressida, the last spoonful of Bovril and some powdered potato. It tasted quite good, but there wasn't nearly enough for eight of us. In the end we decided to use the little soup pots, and to give the full mixture only to Father, Mother and Gregory. The rest of us would have a drop or two and fill up with hot water and gravy browning.

We put the soup on to heat and were debating on a second course when Father came in. He put a tray on the table and began to load it with sherry glasses. "One extra glass tonight, Father dear," I said brightly.

Father looked astonished: "Who's it for?"

"Gregory Manning."

"Never heard of him."

"Oh, darling," I said, "you heard of nothing and nobody else for days after he broke down here last week."

"Oh, that chap. He hasn't broken down again, has he?"

"No, this time he's come to call, and Pan—and we've asked him to stay to supper."

"To *supper*? Does your Mother know?"

"No, she'd gone to bed before we asked him."

"H'm." Father stood in uffish thought. "Oh well, if it's done it's done," he decided, and took his tray off to the Room.

We thought it was very nice of Father to give his hard-working daughters a glass of sherry every evening, and we used to look forward to the ceremony. In fact Pandora said that the blackest time of day in her new little suburban house was sherry-time with no sherry. She felt she would never get used to doing without it.

"Let's leave the soup on the side and come back to do the rest," suggested Pandora. "We'd better go and support Cressida. Thisbe's off upstairs to do her hair."

We went back into the Room to find Gregory handing round the glasses. (They were beautiful old glasses, but Father had brought them on a tin tray.) I could see that both Father and the sherry were making a good impression.

Gregory had reached Teresa as we came in and he hesitated by her chair and said: "May I give you a drink, Teresa, or isn't it allowed?"

He was expecting a giggling refusal, but she only said: "Thank you," and took a sip. She wrinkled her nose and said: "H'm. Not as dry as the last lot, Father," and I really felt proud of her. Gregory was wonderful, but he must learn to treat Teresa as a person, not a hockey-playing little schoolgirl like his probably boring sister.

She turned back to her book, and Gregory, to recover himself, asked what she was reading this time.

"*The Courtier*," said Teresa politely.

"Oh really? Is it a historical novel?"

"It's not a novel at all. It's by Castiglione."

"Who's he? Is it a lesson book?"

"No, it's one of Father's." Teresa was obviously astounded that he'd never heard of it.

"Do you like it?"

"I love it."

"Read us a bit, chicken," said Father, straddling comfortably by the fire.

Teresa looked surprised but did as she was told.

> ". . . And besides this: a great argument of the perfection of the man, and of the imperfection of the woman is, that generally every woman wisheth she were a man, by a certain provocation of nature that teacheth her to wish for her perfection.
>
> "Then Lorde Julian answered sodainely: 'The silly poor creatures wish not to be a man to make them more perfect, but to have libertie, and to be rid of the rule that men have of their own authoritie challenged over them.' "

Father laughed loudly. "There!" he said. "How's that for 1514? Chuck the book over, T." And when he'd caught it, he turned over the pages for a moment and then declaimed:

". . . a wanton life in women is less to be borne withall than in men, that carrie not their children nine months in their bodie."

(I looked at Gregory. His embarrassed eyes were fixed on his suède shoes.)

"Then answered Lorde Julian: Doubtless these be prettie arguments that you make, I marvel you put them not in writing. But tell me for what cause is it ordained that a wanton life should not be so shameful a matter in men as in women? . . .

". . . If you will tell the truth, you your selfe know, that wee have of our own authoritie claimed a libertie, whereby wee will have the selfe same offences in us very light, and other while worthie prayse, and in women not sufficiently to bee punished, but with a shameful death or at least everlasting slaunder."

"You see?" said Father. "That book was translated into English in—I forget—about 1561 I think. We haven't progressed enormously since then, have we?" He turned to Gregory. "What do *you* think?"

"I—er—oh I quite agree, sir," said Gregory, his large brown eyes fixed on Father's face in alarm.

"Quite agree with what?"

"That it is much worse in a woman because of the—er—nine months you've just mentioned."

I began to blush, expecting Father to tear him in pieces, a thing he can do quite unconsciously. But he only stared for a moment, smiled, and said kindly: "Let me fill up your glass."

I was glad that Thisbe had not come back into the Room, for she might have said something scarifying. Pandora never interrupted her quiet contemplation of the fire, and Cressida looked protective; only Teresa was visibly scornful. Her lip curled like Mr. Darcy's, but Gregory, thankfully accepting more sherry, didn't notice.

I began to make excuses for him. The poor boy was tired and he didn't want to sit and listen to boring extracts from sixteenth-century Italian classics. He wanted to talk to us—particularly, I hoped, to me—and it was no wonder he hadn't bothered to listen. All the same this disloyalty to my upbringing made me feel a little guilty; I had never myself found *The Courtier* dull.

Father now began to question Gregory on his work, his relations, his tastes and his ambitions. He did this with enormous charm, so that Gregory opened his petals and would have told him practically anything. I was thankful that Father didn't scrutinize his financial prospects; they were almost the only things he left alone. I hoped that Gregory's youthful good looks and deferential manner would make him popular with Father, but I had an uneasy feeling that he was only being overhauled to be used. He would not appear recognizably in print I knew, for Father's characters are never simply portraits; but his background and profession might well come in handy, and some of his mannerisms would probably pop up in the least expected places.

Deeply interested as I was in the conversation, I felt that I ought to get back to the kitchen, and as I left the Room Cressida murmured an excuse and followed me. I don't think she trusted me to cope unaided.

I was rather proud of our solution to the soup problem, and felt annoyed when Cressida, after having it explained, rubbed her hands distractedly over her burning hair and asked how we should be sure that the right people got the right bowls?

I said that I should float a single baked bean on the surface of each of the three winners, and that this was doubtless what the Russians did when foreign correspondents visited their hospitals and asked to taste the patients' lunch.

Cressida said the correspondents must be pretty dumb if so, and what if the beans sank.

I said: "All right. In any case I don't think we have any baked beans. We'll use a small fragment of lettuce-leaf, instead."

Even Cressida couldn't say that lettuce would sink, and while she was pondering I climbed up for an inspection of Father's food-parcel shelf. We'd been rather heavy on the parcels during Pandora's visit and on Father's instructions had already packed up a number of tins for her to take back with her to London so that now the cupboard was very nearly bare.

"Father's overseas admirers had better get a move on," I said rather resentfully. "There's almost a famine. What's this do you suppose?"

I threw down a tin whose label had not survived the journey, and Cressida appraised it. "Only butter, and probably rancid," she said ungratefully.

"They couldn't *know* about Mother and the farm," I pointed out. "Well, here's one of chocolate biscuits. That doesn't help much. What's this? Curses, it's only lard, and this one's marmalade."

"*Morgan!* What *are* we to do?" said Cressida.

"Tremble and faint not, brave heart. Here's—oh, Thermopylæ! It's soap!"

Cressida moaned: "No cheese? No sausages?"

"None. Just a minute." I reached higher and pushed my hand to the back of the shelf. "Salvation, salvation! Do you know what I've found?"

"Oh *what*?"

"Lovely beautiful ham!" I sang, and fell, clutching the tin, to the floor.

I wasn't bruised, however, and jumped up, full of enthusiasm. "Let's have it minced on toast, hot, shall we?"

Cressida agreed. "I'll do it," she said. "We shall want a sauce first." And then as I searched for the tin-opener, she added: "What about a pudding?"

"Oh rubbish, darling. Two courses will be ample, and such *recherché* ones!"

"I'm sure he'll expect a pudd."

I expect I should have weakened, and the dried apricots meant for tomorrow's lunch would have been offered up before Gregory, if Pandora had not at that moment come bustling into the kitchen.

To her, as a visitor from the outer world, we appealed, and she unhesitatingly vetoed the pudding. Few people, she said, could lay on a three-course supper at a moment's notice nowadays, and Gregory ought to be thankful indeed to be offered ham. We'd have coffee, though, she added, and she had come to make it. As a sop to Cressida we agreed to serve chocolate biscuits with the coffee.

Pandora said that Father had squeezed Gregory dry and had handed him over to Thisbe. She was entertaining him now, looking, added Pandora, extremely piratical with a black scarf round her head and an enormous pair of curtain-ring ear-rings.

It now emerged that Cressida thought we ought to have dinner in the dining-room, complete with lots of clean silver, and, if possible, candles. I inclined to the more homely—and much warmer—atmosphere of the kitchen. Pandora, however, pointed out that if we brought it into the Room on trays, Father would be less likely to say: "What the devil are you up to tonight, children?" Even so, we should be lucky if he didn't demand his milk and his cheese. These considerations convinced Cressida and me, particularly as we were both wondering what Thisbe was saying to Gregory, and the tray supper would probably be the soonest ready. The three of us worked as fast as we could, and really produced some quite creditable results.

We decided to send Teresa upstairs with Mother's tray, as Mother wasn't likely to scold her. For we feared that even if Gregory's voice did not float up to Mother's wakeful ears, she was sure to notice that his car hadn't gone yet. We called Teresa out of the Room, and as we gave her the tray we added, in ferocious accents, an account

of what we'd do to her if she commented unfavourably on her own soup. Teresa lifted the lid and smelt the soup (complete with fragment of lettuce-leaf). She said: "But I think it smells rather nice."

We laughed hollowly. "Yours won't, my child," we said. "Off you go!"

We had hoped to find a chance to warn Thisbe also of the beverage in store for her, but by the time we'd carried in our trays and circumvented Gregory's polite efforts to pass on his lettuce-containing bowl to someone else, we were too flurried to do anything but sit down and hope. I watched her face as she lifted the first spoonful to her lips. She looked startled and glanced across at Gregory, who was eating with relish. She tried another spoonful, touched her lips delicately with her napkin and made a careful survey of all her companions. Father was enjoying his soup too much to ask for milk; he was drinking it, rather inelegantly, from the bowl. Pandora took hers from the spoon in gulps, and followed each gulp hurriedly with a piece of toast. Teresa, with a look of intense loathing on her fair chubby face, was plodding on as though to the beat of slow music.

When Thisbe's eyes turned to me I winked, and she compressed her lips and nodded almost imperceptibly. She gave a sigh. "Heigh ho!" she said (words I have never before heard pronounced), "your soup is always delicious, dear Cressida, but alas, you must not tempt me." And she laid down her spoon with gentle regret.

"Surely," said Gregory, "*you* don't have to worry about your figure?"

Thisbe shook her head. "Oh no, I don't. But my doctor has absolutely forbidden soup."

"Oh I am sorry," said Gregory, and added, emboldened by the sherry: "What's the trouble?"

Thisbe looked wistfully into his eyes: "I'm afraid," she said "that I had better not tell you that."

Gregory looked horrified, and Father said: "Don't talk

rubbish, Thisbe, but if you won't finish your soup I will, when I've dealt with mine. It's jolly good."

"Certainly, Father." Thisbe lowered her eyelids and her lips trembled. She shot a glance at me. Most of us had finished by this time, but Father is always slow with anything hot. I stood up and began to range the bowls, including Thisbe's on a tray. I pushed the tray at Cressida and opened the door, and shut it after her. I knew she would go straight to the sink.

Father finished his bowl and looked round hopefully. "Oh!" said Thisbe, "where's my soup gone? Father wants it."

We sent Teresa running to the kitchen, but she was too late, and we had to comfort Father with his ham on toast instead. Luckily it was delicious, and so were the coffee and chocolate biscuits. Then we cleared away, and allowed Gregory to wash up, which he did with exasperating slowness.

At one stage, putting the coffee cups away on the dresser, I had him to myself, and he said: "Don't forget we've got a date in town, will you, Morgan?"

"No," I said. "I'm looking forward to it."

Then we all went surging back into the Room, to find that Father had gone upstairs. We played Consequences, and although they were very feeble they made us yell with laughter.

Gregory left at about ten o'clock, and sure enough the rain was done and a slender cloud-barred moon was riding the tossing black boughs. After he'd gone we stood in the hall and looked at one another. "And now," said Thisbe, unwinding the pirate's turban to reveal the reinstated wavers, "I suspect that we're for it."

Father came downstairs, as she spoke, and he looked tired and anxious. "Come in a minute, children," he said, at the door of the Room. "Not you, little T., you go off to bed." And he kissed Teresa and slapped her bottom to hurry her away. Then he turned to the rest of us: "That

young man," he announced, "is quite *harmless* if rather stupid."

Cressida and I were annoyed, particularly when Thisbe said: "*Eminently* harmless, I should think!"

"But," said Father, "his effect on our household will be far from harmless if he comes here again, staying till all hours and making you behave like a lot of giggling misses. I will not have Mother upset by such nonsense, do you understand? You're not to invite him again."

"Oh, Father——" I wailed, and Cressida said: "but surely, Father——"

Pandora said quietly: "Is this a Convent or something?"

Father's eyebrows came beetling down over his deep-set blue eyes. He said: "Pandora, I don't interfere with what you do in your house, and I've already asked you not to interfere with what I do in mine."

Pandora said: "It's not fair on the girls, Father."

"I don't wish to have to mention this again." Father's voice was getting loud.

Cressida gave a loud gulp and left the room in a hurry. I said: "I'm sorry, Father. Is Mother upset?"

"I'm afraid she is." He looked worn-out, I thought, and I went and put my arm through his.

"I'm so sorry, darling, we ought to have thought."

Pandora said: "Good night then, Father." I was sure that she was afraid of apologizing too if she stayed any longer. Thisbe said "Good night" in a subdued voice, and we all left the Room, Father giving my arm a squeeze as he let me go.

Up in my bedroom I snubbed Teresa, who wanted to talk, and lay in the dark for a long time, considering. Leaving out repetitions, muddled thinking, and red herrings, the result was something like this:

I was sorry to have upset Mother and I would not do it again. Gregory was marvellous and I would see him again as soon as possible. I really believed he liked me quite a

lot. I must and would stay soon, long and often with Pandora.

Having thus arranged a delicious and romantic future for myself, I fell contentedly asleep, without ever asking how, if Gregory called again, we were to keep him out of the house.

CHAPTER VI

I WAS glad to see that Cressida was perfectly cheerful next morning, although I did wonder if she had slept badly. She is one of those people who look ill easily; her gorgeous hair loses its gloss over night, and she has bruises about those greenish eyes. Her cheeks, which are always thin, fall suddenly into touching little hollows and one longs to pet and pamper her.

I decided, on seeing her so cheerful, that her interest in Gregory could only be a general one. He was a young man, and heaven knows we didn't see many. Naturally she had been upset when Father seemed likely to exclude all young men from the house. We had had such a pleasant evening, too, and she had laughed so much and so loudly, that Father's announcement had come as a shock. I have always known that Cressida flies higher and falls more heavily than the rest of us. She was only eighteen, too, and I remembered how young and excitable I had been myself a year ago.

As for me, I had awakened full of the determination to go back to London with Pandora. I wanted this so badly that it seemed nothing could stop me and after breakfast I went into my room to go through all my clothes.

Father was generous with money presents to us all, but there was no regularity about them. When he received a thumping cheque from his publisher we all got handfuls of banknotes; in between whiles we lived on air, except in the case of Cressida, who never spent the last few pounds of one windfall until she had received the next one. Instead of admiring her prudence, I rather despised her for it.

One rule we had to keep. Ever since Pandora, aged seventeen and buying her own clothes for the first time, had run up a bill for £140, we had all been made to pay cash. Father had given us a very grave lecture about the

dishonesty of debt, and he had deeply impressed us all, down to the thirteen-year-old Cressida, with his sincerity. So now I could not tear round the London shops buying clothes on prospects, and I was sorry that I hadn't copied Cressida for once.

I'd spent nearly all of my last dollop from Father on Pandora's wedding present, and now I hadn't a decent short frock to wear to the theatre. I did have a very pretty evening dress, not new but still fashionable, which I'd only worn once. We'd startled the audience at a local amateur dramatic show by sweeping in—all seven of us—in evening dress, headed by Father and Mother who looked like royalty. It was a white velvet dress, high at the throat, with long tight sleeves, and I tried to forget what it had cost me. My sisters liked me in it, and it certainly did show off my dark hair and grey eyes. The bodice drew modest attention to my bosom, while the skirt's classic folds concealed, of course, my legs, which are my worst feature. So I prayed that Gregory would plump for evening dress; but what was I to do if he didn't? I banged the doors of my wardrobe in disgust. I should just have to borrow. A frock of Cressida's could be shortened, or one of Pandora's let down. As for Thisbe, she was so small and slight that she was for ever safe from marauding sisters.

I ran downstairs to find a conference in progress between Thisbe, Pandora and Cressida. The muted air of "To a Wild Rose" came from the Room, indicating Teresa's occupation.

I burst into the dining-room, where the girls were polishing the furniture, and seizing a duster began to rub, while I ruthlessly interrupted everyone to say: "Look, can one of you lend me a short frock to take to London?"

"How short?" said Thisbe.

"What for?" said Cressida.

Pandora said: "Oh, darling! Do you think you'll be allowed to come?"

"Oh yes, surely. I'll undertake not to upset Mother by

having Gregory here again, and then I'm sure Father will do his best for me."

"I'm sure he will." Pandora looked anxious. "But do you think that will be enough?"

"Oh yes, I think so."

"I think you ought to come whatever happens," said Pandora. "You agree, don't you, Thisbe?"

Thisbe nodded and went on polishing. Her arm looked round and pretty with the sleeve rolled up. She was getting a terrific gloss on to her end of the table.

"Well don't let's expect the worst," I said, beginning to get worried. I knew I couldn't go if Mother seriously opposed it, whatever my elder sisters might say.

"The point is," said Cressida, "how are we going to stop Gregory from coming here again? We were just discussing it when you came in. *I* want us to have an arrangement to meet him in the town, at the cinema or something, next time he comes."

"It's an idea," I admitted, and looked at Thisbe.

"Better write him a letter, I think," she said, pausing for a moment to flex her aching arm, "to say we're all going away."

"Or we're in quarantine," said Pandora.

"But then," pleaded Cressida, "we couldn't see him at all. Father hasn't forbidden us to see him *away* from the house."

"No, indeed," said I, "but I'd much rather see him in London than at the flickers, or the Old Mill Café."

"They don't flicker nowadays," objected Thisbe. "You might just as well talk about the bioscope and be done with it."

"That's only in South Africa, isn't it?" asked Pandora, interested.

Cressida thumped suddenly on the table: "Oh do stick to the *point*!" she said. "Why can't we keep a look out for Gregory's car, and if we see it we—er—the one who sees it goes briskly down to the gate and says she was just off

to the cinema, and the rest of the family are out, and why doesn't he come to the cinema with her? What's wrong with that?"

"Everything, my poor dear," I said. "To take just one thing, unless you spend your entire life dressed for the cinema, with your lipstick on your face, and your bag in your hand, and your other hand hovering on the front-door knob, you won't be briskly walking down to the gate until he's got tired of ringing and heard me playing the piano, or Thisbe talking to Mrs. Phillips, and come round to the window of the Room and looked in. And then where are you?"

Cressida looked crushed and I felt a pig. "All the same ——" I said.

Thisbe helped herself to polish, and put down the tin with a decisive click. "Quite honestly," she said, "I don't think Gregory's worth worrying about; I think he's a thundering bore. Still, there are other young men I suppose (though you'd never think it), and we ought to put up some sort of a fight on principle. You'd better go to London, Morgan, and find you a mate; then there'll be two of you married, and you can concentrate on Cressida and me. Five of us! Isn't it a forbidding thought?"

I said: "Thank you, Thisbe, but I don't want a husband yet, and I don't think Gregory's any kind of a bore, thundering or otherwise."

"Of course he's not," said Cressida. "He's just properly brought up, and makes me ashamed that we're not."

Pandora said frowningly: "I wish you didn't all think so much about young men."

"Don't all girls?" I said.

"Probably they do, but they're not so dreadfully frank about it."

I could see that Cressida was making a note of this, but Thisbe said: "Well, if we're badly brought up let us at least be frank. I'm like Lydia Bennet—I long for a 'regiment of Militia'—whatever militia is."

Thisbe is so often flippant that it's never easy to know what she's thinking. Often she speaks as a small boy uses a stick—simply to stir up trouble. Even now, after many disillusionments, I think her poems are very good, and miles above my head, so perhaps Thisbe herself is miles above my head, and I shall never manage to get up to her level. Anyway, she had me foxed, as usual; I didn't know if she really wanted us to meet lots of young men or not. Thinking of Gregory's first visit, however, I resented her calling him names.

"Thundering bore or not," I said, "you certainly did brandish your ski-trousers at him."

Thisbe grinned: "That was only to keep my hand in."

"Your buttocks, you mean," I said crossly, and Cressida said: "*Morgan!*" But Thisbe only laughed.

"You see?" said Cressida. "We *are* badly brought up, I know we are. Morgan has only to feel angry about something and she starts talking about buttocks!"

The rest of us roared with laughter, and I'm afraid Cressida's hurt face, with tears coming into the sea-nymph eyes, only made us laugh the more. In the end she slammed out of the Room, and we looked at each other guiltily.

"Oh dear," said Pandora. "Now we've been unkind."

"It's her own fault," said Thisbe. "No one so straight-laced has any right to exist in this family. Where on earth does she get it from, poor child? When she marries she will have just two odiously correct children, and neither of them will ever laugh or shout or dirty its nappies."

"Cressida shouts more than any of us," I pointed out.

"So she does. It just shows that real people aren't as tidy and consistent as they are in books."

"She only shouts because she's highly-strung, poor pet," said Pandora. "There's nothing to prevent you from being highly-strung *and* conventional. I expect she's feeling awfully hurt now; you know how horrible it is when you think people are talking about you." She followed Cressida, and Thisbe and I were left to finish the polishing. We were a

little ashamed of ourselves. Cressida is so frightfully easy to bait, and we were a thoughtless pair in those days.

"If you're planning to go up with Pandora," said Thisbe, continuing rather slowly and meditatively with her work, "you ought to beard Father today."

"Now, if he's in good fettle."

"He seemed all right at breakfast. I wonder if Mother ——"

"I expect she calmed down when he told her you'd apologized. He stayed a long time when he took up her breakfast, but he was quite jovial when he came down."

"I don't think I need tackle her myself, do you?"

"Pandora tried that, and look what happened."

"She would go *on* so. I don't know what came over Pandora, it was simply frightful. No, I shall talk to Father. I suppose he's working now?"

"More than you are," said Thisbe, straightening her sapling back. "You've been standing there watching me for the last five minutes. In any case we've done enough to this dam' room; I'm going upstairs to write." I could feel her losing interest in me as she left the room, and I was a little disappointed; but I know Thisbe when she's on a poem, and I couldn't be resentful. On the whole she had been sympathetic.

Good little Teresa was playing a Bach gavotte very nicely. I stood outside the door and listened for a minute; she was really coming on apace. I went upstairs and listened at Father's door; the typewriter was chattering, so I couldn't go in and get the interview over. I was turning away when Pandora came down the two white-painted steps from Mother's room. "Come and talk," she said, heading for the spare-room.

I followed her in and we began to make her bed together.

"Look, darling, don't borrow a dress from anyone. If you're allowed to come I'll lend you the money and we'll go out together and get you a frock and hat."

"Oh, Pandora, no!" I protested, determined to accept her offer.

"Yes, really, Morgan, you can let me have it back in a month or two. It will be terrific fun choosing the things."

"It doesn't seem right," I said, "but you're an angel to suggest it. Black, I think, don't you?"

"It's never any good deciding ahead. Rather like saying you're certain some word you've forgotten begins with a B, and then it always turns out to be a T or a Z."

"Quite true. Oh, Pandora, they *must* let me come!"

But they didn't. I think Father was sympathetic, but he wouldn't commit himself in the slightest until he'd spoken to Mother, and then he came back—rather apologetically, poor man—to say that I couldn't go this time, but he hoped perhaps later on, when Mother hadn't been recently upset——

I was absolutely miserable. My heart was broken, I decided; Gregory was my ideal and I his, and our burgeoning young love was being blighted by the cruel East Wind of Fate.

If only I could have looked really ill, I think Mother might have relented, for she hated any of us to be unwell, but my obstinate cheeks remained pinker than my swollen eyes, and although I determined before each meal that I would shun food, my resolution always failed at the sight of the dishes.

Pandora tried to persuade me to break away. I could not understand this new attitude of hers to poor, lovely, pathetic Mother, and I told her so flatly. Then I retired into myself, played the piano mournfully and insistently, and settled down to be a permanent member of the noble army of martyrs.

CHAPTER VII

SOMETIMES I think that I can have no tenacity of purpose whatever. It only took me two days to feel cheerful again, and when, on the third, Father (who had really felt sorry for me, I believe) asked if I'd like to take Teresa to the cinema, I jumped at the offer, and held out my hand hopefully for the ticket money, which Father promptly put into it. Thisbe, invited to come too, said she was busy, thank you, but would like to come next time Father forked out, and Cressida waved away my invitation with a tragic air that annoyed me, as I thought tragedy my prerogative at the moment. I remembered to walk down solemnly as far as the gate, and hoped that Mother thought my back view pathetic, and then I grabbed Teresa's arm and started to galumph with her along the road.

There was an educational film on at the Regal, and we both knew perfectly well that Teresa was meant to go to that. Father, indeed, had said: "There's a film on this week that little T. really ought to see, Morgan. Be interesting for you too." But he hadn't actually said its name, and as we walked down the blue-black road into the town, our voices rising and falling above the loud and continuous passage of cars, we agreed to go to the Odeon instead, and see Gary Cooper. Teresa, poor child, had never seen him, and I felt that a view of that heart-moving profile would be an education for her indeed.

Father had given us money for the most expensive seats (it would never occur to him to save over things like that) and we decided to keep part of it, and go to the Old Mill Café afterwards for tea. The one and threepenny seats, we agreed, were good enough for us. I couldn't help feeling pleased and excited and Teresa was bouncing up and down and chattering incessantly. I told myself that I

must not let my adult sorrows spoil the child's innocent fun.

One of the cars coming down the hill behind us slowed suddenly and stopped at my elbow. It was a rusty-looking two-seater, and a man's voice spoke from behind an almost opaque talc window. "Can I give you a lift?"

I'm not sure whether the training of my early childhood intervened at this point, to make me refuse, or whether I was too much taken aback to think properly. Honesty makes me admit, in any case, that if the car had been large and expensively glistening I should probably have hopped in without ado. As it was I primly but politely expressed our thanks and regretted that if we went by car we should arrive too early at our destination.

"Pity," said the voice—rather a nice voice—and the car ground unmusically away.

"Oh dear," said Teresa. "We could always have looked at the shops."

"The walk's doing us good," I said firmly, unwilling to admit my mistake.

"He sounded rather nice."

"Yes, didn't he?" I was beginning to feel angry with myself. It occurred to me suddenly that any girl of spirit who had been as badly treated as I had would prove her independence by conquering new worlds, and by this fine phrase I meant that it was time I picked up another young man. And now I had thrown away an excellent chance of being picked up myself instead. I turned to Teresa: "I've been silly," I said, "but all is not yet lost. Teresa, don't let's go home empty-handed today. Let's find ourselves a handsome young man, shall we, and take him home with us?"

"You mean to replace Gregory," said Teresa sensibly. "Yes, all right, and if he has a big car so much the better."

"The point is, how are we going to set about it?"

"You could drop your handkerchief, I suppose."

"I rather doubt if that would work. It's a pity we haven't a car ourselves. I believe punctures are very effective."

"Could you faint in the cinema?"

"Not convincingly. Besides, some sort of motherly woman would be sure to crop up if I did."

"And then she'd stick a needle in our arms and we'd wake up in a brothel," said Teresa, large-eyed.

"Not you, darling, you're too fat."

"I wouldn't be too fat for long, would I?"

"Perhaps we could sprain our ankles?"

"I'll tell you what I read," said Teresa, looking coy. "That if two girls are alone together at the pictures and they both light up cigarettes at the same moment, it means if any young men are about they'd like them to join them."

"Teresa," I said in surprise, "where on earth did you read that?"

"Oh, just in a paper." She wouldn't say any more and I suppose I shall never know the answer; it certainly wasn't in any of the rather literary journals we take in. I had a base suspicion that Teresa had been snooping in Mrs. Phillips's paper, for our gardener's wife often hangs up her distressing green coat with a cheap magazine sticking out of the pocket, and I've sometimes been tempted myself to pull it out and have a look. But it was very wrong, I told myself, to accuse poor Teresa of falling into a temptation that I'd resisted myself, and certainly no amount of cigarette-lighting would attract a young man to Mrs. Phillips's side. I said: "Well, it's worth trying, Teresa—clever of you to think of it," and I felt her relax beside me.

We bought our one and threepennies and found our way hand in hand into the dim cinema. I always loathe following the little torch, which goes much too fast for me, and I'm always certain that I shall break my neck, or else (and this fear is a most horrible and convincing one) that I shall step on a dead face in the dark. I made Teresa go ahead and held on to her tightly, hoping that she thought I was protecting her. I don't know why my imagination has to go littering the floors of cinemas with corpses, none of Father's murders has taken place in the cinema; but

there it is, and I was thankful to arrive safely and sit down.

A very dull film about fishes was being shown, and after I'd recovered my nerve, I whispered to Teresa that this would be a good moment to try lighting cigarettes. I proudly produced my case (a slender gold one that Mother had given me for my last birthday) and struck a match. Teresa's eager face bent over it (she smokes very well for her age) and then I lit mine. Nothing happened. The fish film ended and an even duller boxing story began. Teresa whispered: "Let's try again," and I struck a match and held it in turn to our dwindling cigarettes. The little light, although it brought no phalanxes of gay youths leaping over seats to converge upon our position, did show up a male back immediately in front of us, and drew attention to the fact that the shape—previously silhouetted against the screen—was that of a *young* man. The back of his neck was positive proof of that.

Teresa and I waited agog for the boxing to finish. The pugilists became less and less human as their eyes grew blacker, their mouths bloodier, and their excessively long hair fell further across their faces. Teresa shut her eyes, and I felt a little sick; they were a low form of life but one had to admire their courage. It ended at last with one of them face downwards on the floor and making vain efforts to rise like someone doing press-ups. The winner grinned and was applauded, the victim was propped up, they shook hands, and the screen quivered into an expanse of white.

During the advertisements which followed, the building was quite light and we were able to study the head and shoulders of the young man in front. His jacket was of greenish tweed, his head well-shaped, his hair fair and glossy with a slight wave. He had nice ears and the back of his neck was truly delicious. I raised my eyebrows at Teresa and she nodded violently. I stubbed out my cigarette, took a fresh one, and leant forward. "Excuse me," I cooed, "have you a match?"

The young man turned round, and for a sublime moment I compared him to David Niven. Then he spoke, and I knew that all was lost. "Pardon?" he said, "I didn't quite catch?"

"A light," I said rather hysterically. "You know, for this," and I waved the cigarette at him.

He turned right round to face us. He looked overjoyed as he clicked a lighter and asked if we were alone. Not only did his voice send a pain right up my spine, but he had false teeth.

I said piously: "Our Father is waiting for us," and he looked dashed. He accepted my thanks with a wave of his hand and turned back to the screen. Teresa and I searched for each other's hands and squeezed. After a moment, we moved further along the empty row of seats.

After such a setback, a lesser man than Gary Cooper would have failed to get us interested. As it was, however, we found the film enthralling and had no time to be ashamed of our foolishness. We came out, dazzled with romance, into the lamplit streets and found that it was raining.

"I'm afraid," I said, "that we ought to get the next bus, and forget about the tea-shop."

"Oh *no*, Morgan! Don't let's go home yet. It's not far to the Old Mill and we can keep under cover part of the way."

Teresa's idea of keeping cover was to press herself like a loving cat along the shop windows, so that any leaking gutters overhead splashed her briskly across the shoulders. We hurried down the shining pavements and I thought guiltily that we *should* have brought mackintoshes, and I *should* have been taking my young sister straight home. Like Cressida, she tends to get chesty, and her coat wasn't very thick. In the Old Mill Café, however, the fire was piled high, and when we'd hung up our steaming coats and I had tried to dry Teresa's bobbed hair with my handkerchief, we sat down and prepared to enjoy our-

selves. Teresa still thought we might captivate the owner of a luxurious car, and so save ourselves the painful plunge through rain to the bus stop, but I felt that I had learnt my lesson and was not likely to be so silly again.

We ordered scones and strawberry jam and looked approvingly about us. The Old Mill Café has enough pewter and copper but not too much, the two waitresses wear well-cut pink linen overalls, the tablecloths are clean, the china pretty, and they provide large jugs of hot water without being asked. The scones, when they arrived, were freshly cooked and not merely hotted up. I said: "We'll come here again, T., it's a good place."

Teresa said: "Look, Morgan. Perhaps *he's* got a car."

I glanced at the man coming in, and I thought it wasn't likely. He was shortish, dark, and had a long face and a long upper lip. He looked rather like a younger Sir Cedric Hardwicke. He was unbuttoning a dark blue mackintosh, and I thought snobbishly that it made him look like a grammar-school boy. He was better without it, though. He hung it up, with his dirty green hat, and flattened his black hair quickly with both hands. Then he looked round and found our eyes fixed upon him. He smiled. "Hullo," he said, coming over to us. "It's you."

"Yes, it's us," I said rather blankly. Then I made an effort and waved the teapot encouragingly. "Have some tea?"

He smiled again. It was a nice smile that came and went on his blue-chinned face in a flash. He sat down at our table and said: "Why were you so keen to walk? Did you think I'd abduct the two of you?"

Then I realized who he was, and Teresa, who was quicker than I, said: "Of course not, but we couldn't see you properly through that window."

"Well, anyway, as we've met already, we don't need an introduction. Are you sure you don't mind if I join you?" He looked as settled as if he'd been there for hours, and he obviously needed no answer.

However, I thought I might as well be gracious, so I bowed slightly and said: "We should be charmed." Then, to regularize our position, I added: "Our name is Harvey."

"Miss Harvey and Miss——?"

"Miss Teresa Harvey," I finished for him.

"How do you do," he said gravely. "I am Patrick True."

We both looked at him with interest and he looked back at us with apparent appreciation. Teresa's round face was glowing under her draggled hair and she smiled warmly at him. She is not, thank goodness, a talkative or pushing child, but she was somehow at ease with Patrick True, and I had the feeling that she liked him for himself, not just because he had a car, and might perhaps drive us home.

I said: "I do earnestly recommend these scones."

"They look all right." He met the waitress's eye and she came over. He ordered tea, scones and—to our surprise—marmalade. Then he said: "How are you going to get home, up that long hill of yours?"

"By bus."

"Not by my car? It leaks a bit but it's right outside this shop, which is something in its favour."

"It's very nice of you——" I said hesitatingly. I was rather in awe of Patrick True, and didn't feel inclined to take possession of him, as I had of Gregory. In spite of the grammar-school mackintosh I thought he was sophisticated, and he was at least thirty-five, older even than Pandora's James. I suddenly felt certain that he was married, and I said: "Have you got a wife somewhere about?"

He blinked. "No, I don't own one, alas. Does that make me better or worse?"

"In what way?"

"As a giver of lifts."

"I don't think it affects the question——" I was beginning with dignity, but Teresa, speaking emphatically, said: "Better. Much better."

He looked at her with amused interest. "How's that?"

"Well, we hope you'll come in to meet the others, and ——" Teresa's courage began to fail her, and looked to me for help. But I examined the tablecloth and left her to struggle. "Well, we're such a *lot* of woman—six of us, you see—that's when Pandora's here without James—and there's only Father to—to balance us all."

"And I wouldn't be much use if I had a wife to throw into the scales?" Patrick True had a kindly way of wrinkling his eyes, but I couldn't leave poor Teresa to be laughed at and to give him quite the wrong impression of us.

"She only means today," I said. "As it happens none of our men friends are about at the moment and our eldest sister is staying with us without her husband. Teresa feels that poor Father is almost submerged by the Monstrous Regiment."

"It sounds rather enviable," said Patrick True. "Has he five daughters then? And are you two typical samples?"

"Oh no, we're only the throwouts," I said. (I'm afraid I was too vain to think he'd take me seriously.) "The others are much more exciting. Cressida—that's the one between us—has red hair and green eyes and lovely long slim legs, and Thisbe, she's older, is little and dark. I should think she's a *belle laide*. She's not *much* older," I added, in case he should think she was on the shelf. "She writes frightfully good poems. Then Pandora is the eldest, and she's married."

"She is Mrs. Tremayne," said Teresa helpfully.

"And your name——"

"She's Morgan," said Teresa, before I could speak. "Please, Mr. True," she hurried on, "may I ask you something?"

"Anything."

"Well, if it's not rude to ask, didn't your Mother think of calling you Thomas instead of Patrick? It seems too good to miss, somehow."

"Teresa, what are you talking about?" I said, and felt

a fool when Patrick said at once: "Do you mean Thomas the Rhymer? How simply splendid. You're quite right, of course, but I've an elder brother and *he's* Tom."

Teresa's pink face dimpled happily, and she began to declaim:

> " '*Harp and carp, Thomas,' she said,*
> *'Harp and carp along wi' me,*
> *And if ye dare to kiss my lips*
> *Sure of your bodie I will be.' "*

The waitress, the only person near our table, looked astonished, and I began to feel rather embarrased. But Patrick was obviously delighted with Teresa, and he said: "I'll have to introduce Tom to you one day. Do you write poems yourself?"

"Oh no, not real ones. Thisbe's the one, hers are *lovely*. Do you write, Mr. True?"

"Patrick. Yes, I live by my pen, in a state of considerable squalor."

"Oh, then you must meet Thisbe!" said Teresa. "You can advise her how to get her things published."

I had the impression that Patrick was averse to Thisbe, so I said: "What sort of things do you write?"

"Whatever I can sell."

"Novels? Plays?"

He made a little silencing gesture with lips and head. "Don't tempt the gods. The play's not written yet."

"What sort of play?"

"Oh, a brand new sort, quite indescribable, and probably, in the end, quite unactable and unsellable. Don't let's talk about it. What do you do?" he said to me.

"I play the piano."

"Oh, do you? Are you at the Royal College, or somewhere?"

"No, I just work at home." And I added truthfully, and to make it sound better: "I have a course of private

lessons and then carry on alone for a bit, and then have another."

"I see," said Patrick True, but I was sure he didn't. It was odd, I thought, how people seemed to expect me to go out and work for a living. I didn't need to work and I thought Mother was quite right—I was lucky to be out of the turmoil, to be able to play my piano without material anxieties. At the same time, I had to suppress the inkling that a little competition might have made me work harder.

Patrick said: "You play the piano, and Thisbe writes verse, and—what's the red-haired one? Cressida?—what's she do?"

"Gardens, mostly," said Teresa.

"She more or less market-gardens," I put in.

"So you all live at home. Do you like that?"

"Very much indeed."

"But you go away a lot, I suppose, to stay with school friends and so on?"

"None of us have ever been to school," said Teresa proudly.

I laughed at Patrick's face. "Don't look at me as if I was a brontosaurus," I said, "we're only about fifty years out of date."

"You really do seem to be a very remarkable family." And he added, forgetting to be polite: "All those extraordinary names! Fancy calling a girl Morgan! Is it a family name?"

"No indeed. It's after Morgan la Fée. I like it!"

"Sorry. Of course, it's very nice, but just a little startling. Thisbe too, and Cressida——"

"The names were Mother," said Teresa. "She was a bit nervy always, just after she'd had us and she got an idea for a name into her head, and Father would have agreed to anything, to please her. But she'd lost interest when it came to me," she added regretfully.

"Just as well," I said. "You'd probably have been Boadicea."

"Remarkable!" said Patrick. "It refreshes me enormously to meet you two."

"We can't help being remarkable," said Teresa. "We have a very remarkable father."

Patrick looked amused. "Is his name odd too?"

"His real name is only Tom Harvey," I said, "but he's extremely well known by another one."

"What's that?" Patrick still looked amused, and I think he expected Father's fame to be purely parochial.

Teresa told him. It was fun to watch his face. "Great God Almighty!" he said reverently. "You don't mean it!" He sat up and attacked the table top with emphatic fist blows. "*The, only, really, great,* detective writer there has ever been," he said. "You lucky, lucky girls. Do you realize what an extraordinary man you have for a father? He's lifted up the petty artificial little medium of the detective novel and made an Art of it."

"Of course we realize," said Teresa. "We've just told you."

"So you have, I'm sorry." Patrick was looking at us as if we were creatures from some vastly superior planet. I must confess that although I adored Father's books myself, it did surprise me that a poet and potential playwright—a *serious* writer—should be so reverential about them.

"Are you ever going to invite me to meet him?" Patrick's hand went to his tie.

"Of course we are," said Teresa. She looked at me. "Would this evening——"

"Well no, I'm afraid it wouldn't," I said. "I heard him telling Pandora he'd not be coming down for tea or sherry."

"Oh dear." Patrick looked sympathetic. "I'm sorry to hear he's not well."

"Oh he is," said Teresa. "He's always well, bless him. But his dressing-room's upstairs, you see."

Patrick's polite puzzlement made me laugh. "He does all his writing in what we call his dressing-room," I said,

"and when he's on to something special he doesn't leave it all day." Secretly I was pleased that Patrick couldn't meet Father today. He would be sure to come again, I thought, and Mother wouldn't mind a scrap because he'd be Father's guest, not ours.

Patrick piled an inconceivable amount of marmalade on to his last piece of scone, and dealt with it. Then he attracted the waitress, by some occult means, paid for his tea and—despite polite protests—for ours, and we all stood up. Teresa and I thanked him as prettily as we could, and he said emphatically that on the contrary he was enormously grateful to us. He could not tell us, he said, how much he had valued this afternoon. Now he would drive us home, but he thought he wouldn't, today, come in and meet our Mother and sisters.

Teresa was very disappointed, and said so, which produced a definite promise that he'd come in one day next week. With this, our tea, and our memories of Gary Cooper, we were content, and we arrived home feeling that we had made good use of our afternoon.

Also, and this was luck, Father never asked us about the film.

CHAPTER VIII

TERESA and I enjoyed surprising our sisters by telling them about Patrick.

Every evening we used to crowd into the little bathroom, all together, and chatter while we got ready for bed. Our rooms were like ice, as only Mother ever had a fire, but the bathroom, full to bursting of steam and Harvey girls, and with pipes heated by the passing bath water, was cosy and snug—detestable words which describe a state almost of bliss on a winter's night.

Teresa was meant to go up to bed at nine, and should have been out of the bathroom before the rest of us arrived. But tonight, by the time she had finished her chapter, grumbled, put away the book, remembered two more books and put *them* away, filled her hot-water bottle, and cleverly engaged Father in a conversation about Wilkie Collins, it was nearly ten and the rest of us were yawning. Father had been writing all day. He hadn't come down for his sherry, or for his milk and cheese, and emerging now from his solitude he felt spacious and benign. *The Moonstone* —its amateurishness and its rich vitality—could have kept him talking for hours. But he tries very hard to be conscientious in our upbringing, and he suddenly realized his responsibilities. Teresa was packed off with a loving smack (she dared not argue) and he began to close the shutters.

The rest of us queued for the electric kettle, and one by one clasping our hot-water bottles like tender sucklings to our bosoms, we went upstairs. I was the last, and when I rushed down from my attic and along the petrifying passage, the others were all assembled. I opened the bathroom door from which floated voices on a white cloud of steam, and bundled gladly into the cramped little room.

Teresa, lobster-pink and even plumper bare than clothed, was being hounded out of the bath by long, white-skinned

Cressida, who, with her green eyes and drowned-lily look, made me think for a moment of Sabrina fair. (That was one name that Mother hadn't thought of.) Thisbe was having trouble with her hair, which had never recovered from its interrupted setting. She was poised on tiptoe, winding up her curls with concentration and often wiping steam off the little looking-glass over the basin. Pandora, in the sort of elegant dressing-gown male film-stars wear, was brushing her teeth. Her clothes hung on the pipes, between Cressida's and Teresa's. Thisbe was still dressed, and her pyjamas were warming.

I put my nightdress on the pipes, removing Cressida's clothes to a cooler position on a peg. No one commented, not even Thisbe when I pushed her aside to get my toothbrush, and when Pandora, who wanted the basin, pushed her again directly she came back.

Teresa, wrapping her chubby immaturity in a towel, said: "Good, Morgan. Now you can tell them all about Patrick."

"Haven't you done all the telling? Anyway, if I described him no one would be impressed. He wears one of those frightful dark blue macks."

"Well, he's probably been in the Navy," said the charitable Pandora.

"He isn't now, and I think he might have got rid of it. All the same, he's quite nice and fairly attractive in a blue-chinned way."

"He's a dear," said Teresa with conviction. "You'll all love him. I do hope Father will be nice to him."

"What I haven't gathered," said Cressida, limbs drifting gently in the water, and eyes almost shut, "is how you got to know him?"

"He offered us a lift——"

"But I refused it——"

"And then he came into the Old Mill——"

"And T. recognized him before I did——"

"And so he had tea with us, and then——"

"Then he drove us home."

"Oh dear!" Cressida opened the green eyes wide, and looked distressed. "Why do we never get introduced properly to people?"

"Never mind, old Grundyus," said Thisbe. "Their intentions are quite honest in spite of unconventional meetings. Look at James."

"*Our* meeting took place in the shadow of the church!" said Pandora.

"Rubbish, the school's half a mile away," said Thisbe.

Pandora looked heavenward. "*Spiritually* speaking!" she said.

It never fails to amuse us that Pandora first spoke to her future husband at the village Sunday School. But Cressida said: "That's all very well, but it simply isn't done to——"

Poor Cressida! Even Teresa joined in the chorus of: "It isn't *done*, it isn't *done*, it isn't *done*!" with which we imitated the voice of a train. Only Pandora refrained.

Cressida looked sulky and her voice began to rise: "It's all very well to laugh——"

Thisbe said: "For heaven's sake, Pandora! If that toothbrush isn't clean now it must be chronically leprous."

"Sorry," said Pandora amiably, moving aside. "Cressida, what about getting out? Or anyway letting the water go."

We had clean water after every second bath. Cressida pulled out the plug with her toes and remained stretched out, subsiding gradually as the water dwindled. I was cleaning my teeth by this time and I pretended I was going to spit into the bath, a horrid little joke of mine that never failed to rouse Cressida. She sprang up, crying: "No *no*! Morgan, you pig! Stop it!"

I turned on the water for Pandora and then ousted Thisbe from the basin. When I'd finished I began to undress, and Pandora took off her dressing-gown and stepped gingerly into the filling bath. I couldn't help thinking it odd that James now saw that nicely rounded figure more often than we did.

Teresa buttoned herself into a pink dressing-gown, and began to brush her hair.

"Teresa!" said Cressida. "You ought to be in bed hours ago. Run along now, and don't worry about your old wig."

Teresa opened her eyes wide. "I haven't done my teeth yet!"

"Then for heaven's sake do them!" I said.

"But I'm waiting for Thisbe to finish her hair!"

"*Thank you*, darling," said Thisbe. "It's nice to be considered by someone, even if with ulterior motives. There!" She tied a large net over her porcupine head. "Now I shall be able to dazzle and beglamour your Patrick whenever he comes to see us. Teeth, Teresa."

I piled my clothes on the floor; there was nowhere else to put them. Then, huddled in my dressing-gown, I sat on them and brushed my hair. "Poor Thisbe!" I said smugly. "Those things do look uncomfortable!"

"Never out of pain, dear!" said Thisbe comfortably. "When do you expect this new acquisition of yours to come and see us?"

"One day next week," I said. And Teresa, turning with her mouth full of tooth-paste, added, "He promised."

"Hurry up, Teresa," said Pandora. "Then I shan't meet him, I'm afraid."

"Oh, Pandora," I exclaimed. "I *wish* you weren't going tomorrow. Can't you stay a little longer? James wouldn't really mind, would he?"

"He certainly would, and what's more so should I. Oh, it's been lovely here, I've adored it, but not any longer, not without James."

"What a shame he couldn't come," I said, but I thought that we could hardly include James in the present scene, and if he'd been here I should never have had Pandora to myself at all. "Thisbe, are you next?" I asked.

"I am indeed. Hurry up, Teresa." Thisbe was down to her vest, in which, sallow without her make-up and topped

by that dreadful hair-net, she looked hideously ugly and not at all like my wickedly attractive sister.

Teresa said: "You must show Patrick your poems, Thisbe. He's dying to see them."

Thisbe said rather crossly: "Why on earth did you go and talk about those?"

"It's all right," I said. "We only mentioned them in passing, and he didn't really seem very interested."

"Oh," said Thisbe, stepping into the bath. She stood astride Pandora's legs, and said: "Get out, get out! Wallowing slug. What does he write himself?"

"Whatever he can sell."

"And can he?"

"What, sell them? Oh yes, he lives by it."

"Pot boilers, I expect," said Thisbe. She lay down as Pandora got out. Last lap, I thought. Perhaps after all I shall get into that bath before midnight.

Teresa was violently defending Patrick. "He's not a *bit* the sort of person to write pot boilers, is he, Morgan? His play's going to be something quite, quite new."

"Hurry up, Teresa," said Thisbe, and Cressida said: "Buzz off, really, darling, now. It's hours past your bedtime."

Teresa looked round wildly but saw that we were all against her. "Go on," we said. "Off with you."—"Out out, damnéd sprite."—"Good night, darling. Really you must go now." So, very reluctantly, she went, but the cold outside the door galvanized her, and we heard her slippers run flapping down the passage.

"Well," yawned Pandora. "I only hope he'll be tactful and you'll be allowed to have him in now and then. We don't want another Gregory incident."

"Poor Gregory," sighed Cressida. She gazed dreamily at her reflection, tilted her head, and brushed her gorgeous hair down over one shoulder.

"Well, he shouldn't have upset Mother," I said unfairly, quite forgetting to feel soulful about him.

"He didn't upset Mother," said Cressida. "We did, making so much noise playing Consequences."

I thought that poor Cressida was not to blame, for she had not met Patrick, who was becoming each moment more glamorized in my thoughts. Beside him, Gregory would appear callow and—what was it that Father had called him?—"quite harmless if rather stupid." A sneaking feeling that I was disloyal—to myself if not to Gregory—was quickly sat on.

"Well," said Cressida defiantly, "I hope that Gregory *will* turn up again, and that Father and Mother will relent. I'm going to bed. 'Night."

"I do believe," said Thisbe, after the door had closed, "that he made a hit with that silly girl."

"Poor Cressida," said Pandora. "She does take life hard, but what can one do?"

"Laugh her out of it," I said.

"We've been trying that for years," Pandora pointed out. "You might see if a little kindness would help."

I said: "Good gracious, Pandora, we're not unkind to the child! Thisbe, do pull the plug."

"Patience, my love, you must learn patience. Pandora, what do you mean? Do you think we're bullies? Surely we can't let the girl get away with all this 'It isn't done' stuff?"

"Poor old Cress," I said, "I suppose she'd like to belong to an *ordinary* family. What an extraordinary ambition."

"Oh, Morgan," said Pandora. "Don't sound so superior. You don't even *know* any ordinary families, and I assure you they have lots of things you haven't got."

"I know," I said, making a face. "All the virtues, and latchkeys, and domestic science diplomas, and cute little houses, and bijou gardens, and hockey, and beauty hints, and paper d'oyleys——"

"That just shows," said Pandora calmly, "that you've no idea what you're talking about."

I looked to Thisbe for help, but she was contemplating her knees and I didn't know what she was thinking.

She suddenly twitched out the bath plug and stood up. "Towel, please. We'll try to be more tender with Cressida," she said, "but you know how maddening she is. She does flap so."

"And she's touchy, in spite of all our efforts," I said mournfully. "All right, Pandora, we'll be velvet-gloved. Pity you can't stay and help."

"I'll wait a bit and then ask if she can come and stay," said Pandora. "Oh darling, not *instead* of you. As well! I want you all, one by one."

"Yes, of course," I said.

My high spirits were slightly lowered, and when I got into the bath, and was left alone, I lay with the tap running and felt depressed. Patrick might or might not turn up again, but what was important and sad was that Pandora was leaving us tomorrow. No one else could take her place, for Thisbe was a devil (a loyal devil, but one who held a toasting-fork and unexpectedly jabbed), and the other two were really only children. If I could have gone with Pandora, I thought, the others could have had Patrick and welcome.

I climbed sadly out of the bath, dried myself, and crept up to my room. The rain had stopped and a large pale moon was posed behind the big cedar tree. I leant out of my window for a moment, shivering but entranced. The long garden was strange to me, the distant fields strange, and Teresa's sleeping face, as I turned to go to bed, was moonlit and looked wise and mature. I stared almost fearfully at this adult stranger, and wondered for an instant if Teresa had died in her sleep and now knew all the secrets of life and death.

Then I scolded myself. Of all the idiots! I bundled quickly into bed, where my dear hot bottle welcomed me, and very soon it soothed me to sleep.

Next morning I was particularly cheerful. Even the

prospect of losing Pandora didn't affect my irrationally high spirits, which sizzled within me throughout breakfast and my perfunctory household chores. As we sat in the taxi, I felt sure that the ban would soon be lifted, and that my next drive to the station would be the start of a happy adventure. Patrick, owing to his sophistication, fitted naturally into my thoughts of London, for all writers were often there, and I decided that he and Gregory would *both* take me to theatres, and I would go to concerts with Pandora, who would not distract me from the music. It was shamefully easy to let one's thoughts wander during a symphony, I knew, but a play was different. When Pandora's train came in, and I had to kiss her good-bye and see her borne off without me, I suffered a momentary relapse and had to blink a little but the frosty morning and the energy I felt milling about inside me wouldn't let me be sad for long. I caught Thisbe's arm as we crossed the cobbled station yard. "Let's walk back," I said. "Do us good."

Thisbe briefly agreed, and leaving the young ones to go by bus we started off, turning aside at the first chance from the roaring main road, and going round about by lanes and field-paths. The sun came out and we took off our woolly gloves and scarves, walking very fast and running down any small hills to gain impetus for the next climb.

Thisbe didn't say much, but her cheeks grew pinker and her eyes brighter, and considering that she's a good inch shorter than I in the legs, she kept up a fair pace.

I said, slowing down, and gasping a little: "Thisbe, oughtn't you to try collecting your poems into a volume, and find a publisher for them?"

She shook her head. (Last night's hairdressing had been a great success.) "Not enough of them, Morgan, and not good enough. I hate all the ones I wrote a year ago, and probably next year I shall hate the things I'm writing now. That's what's so awfully depressing about writing, I expect music's the same really."

"Composing may be, but if you only play—I couldn't get fed up with Beethoven in one year or fifty."

" 'Course you couldn't, silly. Nor could I get fed up with Keats. But you might think your playing had been pretty bum a year ago."

"Oh, I think that about *now*, not a year ago! What you mean, though, is that playing—interpreting—isn't really a creative art."

"It's creating, I suppose, but not in a personal sense. It's more sympathetic, less selfish, if you like."

"And much less lasting."

"Does that matter so much?" She paused, shading her eyes. "If I could really grasp that farm there, the walnut tree, the pond, the sky, the cold air, all those *and* the emotion they give me—— Oh, Morgan, and those two horsemen coming slowly over the hill! If I could put in a poem what it all does to me—the—the *intensity* of it, do you understand? Well, it wouldn't matter if the poem lasted or was completely lost. I'd have done it, I'd have made something perfect."

"Couldn't you write that poem?" I said. The horsemen had stopped on the crest and I watched them as we talked.

"Oh, not now, I've dispelled it by talking about it. There's nothing boiling up pressure inside me."

"But Thisbe," I objected. "You wouldn't be able to write the poem if you really felt it would be lost. Surely you must feel you're speaking to someone? Giving something?"

"I expect you're right, one must feel one's giving out. But once it was written—look, they're coming down."

The two horses, gorgeous copper-coloured creatures with long pale swishy tails, walked slowly towards us. One of the men was the most insolently gorgeous black-browed creature I'd ever seen. The other turned out to be a girl. She sat her horse easily and spoke a few clipped words, barely opened her lips, and the man gazed at her, and his knee touched her knee, and when he saw us he didn't be-

tray a flicker of interest but bent his handsome head nearer hers, and talked earnestly.

The maddening part was that each of us was quite ten times more worth looking at than she, and that she wasn't making the smallest effort to be nice to her companion. Blast the girl! I thought, I'd teach her if I got the chance! Although we'd no men friends in those days, neither Thisbe nor I was used to being ignored; the male glances that came our way usually lingered quite perceptibly.

The girl's eyes—rather small and light under sparse lashes—passed incuriously over us. She drawled a remark to her companion—it sounded like "I couldn't care less, I'm afraid!"—and the two horses broke into a trot. Thisbe and I looked after them. They climbed a little rise, and turning into a field undulated smoothly away at a canter, still knee to knee.

"They're romantic enough at a distance," said Thisbe. "Pity we had to see them close to."

"I wonder why he admired her so much? Perhaps they're engaged."

"*She* didn't seem noticeably loving."

"No, how queer! He really was attractive, wasn't he?"

"Better looking than either Gregory or Patrick?"

"Oh Lord, yes. Why are you laughing, Thisbe?"

"Bless you, my pet, I'm not." Thisbe smoothed her hair thoughtfully. "Well, my girl, that'll teach us to be pleased with ourselves, won't it? The attractive Miss Harveys, what! And that pale thin creature——"

"With her sulky mouth——"

"And all that straight light hair——"

"*Just* like her horse's tail——"

We both began to laugh. "Oh well," said Thisbe, "he's welcome to her as far as I'm concerned. And I hope he'll cane her conceited little bottom for her!"

"Probably too boney to be worth hitting," I said. Father has brought us up to believe that women should be curved

though lissom, and to thank goodness that we all have bosoms and buttocks.

We wondered vaguely where the riders had come from, but we knew few of the people living near, and there are quite a lot of country houses round about.

We lost interest in them after that, but did not go back to our earlier conversation. Instead we relapsed into silence, walking faster and faster, so that we arrived home hot and tired and longing for our lunch.

CHAPTER IX

I HAD pictured Patrick's visit as an improved version of Gregory's. He would arrive in the evening, I assumed, to find us all collected in the Room with its hurrying fire. We would drink sherry, and Father would take Patrick upstairs to see his wall-charts, and it would be Father who would ask him to stay for supper. I even planned the supper in advance, for a rubber planter in Malaya—finding that Father's books took his mind off bandits—had sent us an admirable food parcel. There were prawn crackers, tongue, pineapple, and cream—all we needed for a distinguished little meal. Patrick would be deferential, Father would glow, and we girls would all be well-dressed and would not mob. I was only sorry that Pandora would not be there, to tell me in her gentle sensible way that Patrick was very nice indeed, and a great advance on Gregory.

So it was rather a shock when he turned up on Sunday morning, and a Sunday when it was my turn to cook.

I was in the kitchen when I heard the click of the defective bell. I went to the schoolroom window and saw him in the drive; he must have left his car outside. I was making pastry at that moment and was crumby-handed and rather hot. I had on an old, blue, printed overall, not clean, and no make-up. For once I was glad of my naturally high colour, as I glanced hurriedly in the little glass, and I decided that if my luck held he might think me picturesque. Anyway, I couldn't tidy my hair with crumby hands, so he'd have to lump it.

No one used the schoolroom now; for some reason it was the coldest room in the house and Father had forbidden us to waste fuel trying to warm it. In the summer it became a sewing, ironing and generally useful room, but at the moment it was deep in dust, and thinking of Cressida I

shut its door carefully so that Patrick wouldn't glance in as I took him along to the kitchen. Then I went to the front door and let him in.

"I'm afraid you'll have to come and help me cook," I said. "All the others are out."

If he was disappointed he didn't show it. He came along with me, took off his coat, and began to peel potatoes like a lamb. I thought that he would make a very good husband for someone. Not for me, I was to stay single for years, but for someone older, like Thisbe.

I said: "Father will be back soon, Patrick. He's only gone to church."

"And all your beautiful sisters with him?"

"No, only Teresa and Mother with him. The others have walked round to the Farm to get—they've walked round to the Farm."

"To get something exceedingly illicit. All right, I'm not in the Ministry of Food. Does your Father always go to church?"

"No, it's spasmodic; twice or three times running, and then not for weeks. He likes the singing most, I think; he sings bass."

"And your Mother?"

"I never quite know with Mother." I wasn't going to tell Patrick of Mother's reactions, her ecstasy over the "tender little candle flames" and the Beethoven chant ("I was glad when they said unto me"), her indignation at the discomfort of the pews, the parson's "ow" sounds, and the ornamental organ-pipes. She didn't go often, and it was a toss-up whether she'd come home uplifted or annoyed.

"So you couldn't," said Patrick, "be said to have a strongly religious background. What about Teresa, though? I can imagine her having some very nice exalted feelings about it all."

"At one time we really feared that Teresa'd end up by hie-ing her to a nunnery, but that's off for the moment.

It might come back, of course. At present she's got atheism."

"Atheism? That romantic child?"

"Rather romantic atheism," I said. "She goes to church so as not to hurt Father's feelings, but she stands stiffly all through the creed with her lips pressed together."

"Dear me, yes, I remember," said Patrick sympathetically.

"The odd thing is," I said, "that singing doesn't seem to count. She warbles away like anything."

"That seems very reasonable. After all, no one pretends to believe everything they sing in hymns or psalms——"

"No, and besides it's fun!"

We both laughed. I hope I wasn't disloyal to Teresa. I meant it all very affectionately, and Patrick obviously liked and admired her.

"What about you, Morgan?"

"Me?" I wondered whether to confide in him. He had finished the potatoes and was cleaning up the sink, so I could have a good look at his back view. I said in a rush: "I don't trust it, Patrick, but I don't think I'll ever be happy without it."

He nodded thoughtfully. "You'll probably find something you *can* trust. What about all these peelings, Morgan? Do you keep pigs?

"No, I'm afraid they go in the boiler."

"*Dearly beloved brethren*
Is it not a sin,—"

I joined in:

"*To peel a new potato*
And throw away the skin.
For the skin feeds piggy,
And piggy feeds you;
Dearly beloved brethren
Is not this quite true?"

"Did you learn that facetious little rhyme in the nursery?" said Patrick. "I did, and I can't think where it came from."

"I did too, and nor can I. Thisbe used to preach mock sermons on that text, I remember. She was always the wag of the family."

"We're only two," said Patrick. "I should think you had a good deal of fun."

"We still do," I said, and then, on an impulse, I told him all about the compulsory French cricket. He was flatteringly interested and even astonished. To see his face you would have thought that no family of grown-up girls had ever played French cricket on a winter's day before.

At the end, he said comfortingly: "I'm sure you needn't worry about Teresa's education. She's a Person, that's the main thing, not an imitation of lots of silly little schoolgirls. I'm sure you're all individuals, a whole family of them, and I assure you that's most rare and valuable. Tell me some more about your Father."

I wasn't at all loth, and I started on a few reminiscences of Father's early struggles. He would have told them much better himself, but I knew I'd never get him to in front of a stranger. I'd neglected my cooking rather badly and we were having a fruit pie (bottled plums) for lunch, so while I talked I shaped the lid and fitted it on. Then I began to cut out some leaves, which was pure showing off as I didn't usually bother. Patrick promptly interrupted me to say that a fruit pie had no business with leaves on it, and everyone would think this one contained steak and kidney. We had a short argument and I pointed out that after eating roast beef and Yorkshire pudding it was unlikely that they'd think anything of the sort. I went on rather glumly with my leaves, secretly convinced that he was right. I put the pie in the oven.

Patrick had to wheedle to get me talking again. I shut right down on Father's reminiscences, and began to beat

up the Yorkshire pudding. Because I was cross the whisk kept slipping about and after a minute Patrick said diffidently: "May I have a shot at it?"

I gave it to him with a bad grace, and my temper was restored when I saw how carefully—and how dreadfully slowly—he turned the handle. Bent over the basin, with painful concentration, he said: "Tell me about Pandora. How did she meet her husband, for instance?"

I couldn't resist that one. I said: "Oh, at Sunday School."

"What? Do you mean they were in the same class?" said Patrick, and added: "How very, very touching."

"Oh no, Pandora was a teacher. Rather like Jane Eyre, you know."

"Extremely *un*like Jane Eyre, I should think. Was she a pupil teacher, lisping the Lord's Prayer? Or what, in heaven's name?"

"No, Patrick," I said, trying not to laugh. "You've got it all wrong. This only happened a few months ago."

Patrick laid down the whisk. "It's probably a weakness in me, but I cannot beat batter while listening to a really absorbing story. Now, Morgan, you have all my attention. Just tell me gently and *clearly* what did happen."

"All right," I said. We sat on the table, I enjoying myself and Patrick listening with great attention.

"It all began," I said, "because Pandora went into Mrs. Litherland's shop to buy the bacon ration. And while she was there who should come in but Mrs. Warren (that's the parson's wife) with a young man. He was a cousin who had been sent down by his mother to convalesce after measles. It's all right, Patrick, he was quite grown-up—don't begin to wriggle—he just hadn't happened to have measles before. He didn't like staying with the Warrens very much —no one *would* like it—but there he was, and when he saw Pandora——"

Patrick interrupted: "But then they met in a shop!" he said, in great disappointment.

"Indeed they did not, because Mrs. Warren never thought of introducing them. She was far too busy talking to Pandora about the Sunday School. She wanted the children to start learning carols straight away, although it was only the beginning of term and a bit early, Pandora thought. However, she agreed, and James listened with *enormous* ears, but the old sheep never introduced him and Pandora went away with the bacon while the other two were still waiting for their sweets."

Patrick was obviously enthralled: "So then," he prompted, "he said 'who was that wonderful girl?' "

"Not at all. Then he offered—James has a very nice voice, and he offered to go down on Sunday and sing a few carols to the Sunday School children."

"And it worked!"

"It worked perfectly. He sang all the ordinary ones and then he started that rocking one—do you know it?—'We will rock you, rock you, rock you'—and Pandora had never heard it before. He sang so tenderly that she didn't know if she was here or next Midsummer. And what she liked was that he didn't look at her or try to sing *at* her in the slightest; he sang quite simply, just for the children, and Pandora loved it. So then he walked home with her."

"And in no time they were married? How idyllic! No snags? No family opposition?"

"Why should there have been?" I said, evading the question and asking myself, as I had so often asked, why there should *not* have been. "So there it was. They fell in love, and so they were married."

"What, no soap?" said Patrick, almost reverently. " 'So *he* died, and she, very imprudently, married the barber.' "

"Exactly."

"Well, I think that's absolutely sweet," said Patrick, meaning it. "And you all like him? It's a real success?"

"Oh yes. I think it's a 'Happy ever after.' "

I was enjoying having Patrick all to myself but I also wanted to introduce him to the others. Thisbe and Cressida would probably come straight in to put away the butter and eggs. I hoped they would be, as Jane Austen would say, in good looks.

On the whole we have adapted our parents' handsome features rather successfully. Thisbe is the only ugly one (you could never insult her by calling her plain) and she certainly does make up for it with her bright dark eyes and rather thin, ironic mouth. Cressida is quite perfect in every part, and I am not bad, though my face is too round and my legs the *least* little bit bandy. We all have good teeth and skins, and I hope we remember to be grateful.

Thisbe and Cressida *were* in good looks. They came in, flushed and wind-blown, and Cressida affected surprise when she saw Patrick, but Thisbe spoilt it by saying that she supposed it was his car, then, outside the gate. Cressida had on an old grey tweed coat. Above its bulky collar her slender neck was very white, and her proud little face and troubled green eyes—with all that hair too—would have struck any man speechless. Thisbe had a green mackintosh and a red hood. She was bursting with vitality. Patrick would have stared open-mouthed if he hadn't been well brought up; as it was he helped them out of their coats and devoured them with his eyes. My blue overall began to feel definitely unclean, and when the other two said they were going up to comb their hair, I said I'd come too. Patrick, I said, could stay in the kitchen for a minute or go along to the Room, whichever he liked.

"The Room?"

"Yes. It's—well it's always called that. Mother and Father couldn't agree on a name for it."

"Mother objected to drawing-room——" said Cressida.

"Because we don't withdraw there," said Thisbe.

"And Father wouldn't let us have sitting-room——" said I.

"Because he says it's always so full of women there's never a chair left for him."

"Of course that's quite untrue, but it's what he says."

"And smoking-room's silly."

"And it's not a library or a study——"

"It's only incidentally a music-room——"

"No one ever even *suggested* lounge——"

"We might have had saloon, all Regency——"

"Common-room would have been good. Why didn't someone think of common-room?"

"Anyway, it's just the Room, with a capital R, and that saves a lot of trouble."

Far from being bewildered by all this talk, Patrick seemed to enjoy it. He asked hopefully if we had any dogs or cats, and seemed sorry when we said no, not now. After our last dog died we had taken a vow of perpetual chastity, said Thisbe, in honour of his memory; and we had never, from that day to this, looked at a dog in the way of love. Patrick raised his eyebrows very slightly and asked what had been the dog's name. Thisbe promptly said: "Passover," and I am sure she would have supported the assertion with considerable detail if Cressida hadn't laughed and said that as a matter of fact we'd never owned a dog, although we'd gone in rather for cats at one time.

I could see Patrick getting ready to ask about the cats and I did want to change out of that overall, so I interrupted. "Would you rather stay here like King Alfred, or go and sit in the Room?"

"Here, please," said Patrick, and sat down in a Windsor chair.

We left him there and went upstairs. Cressida said he seemed a pleasant sort of person but not as good-looking as Gregory and rather old. Thisbe said nothing. I changed into a grey jumper and skirt, and put on a lot of Dark Peony lipstick. I then borrowed a pale green apron from Cressida, who grumbled that she didn't keep her clothes

clean and tidy for my benefit, to which I replied that luckily that was just what she did do. We all went down together debating in undertones whether Father would realize that Patrick was *his* guest—not ours—and whether there was any hope of his being invited to lunch.

We made a quiet entry and found Patrick, at the kitchen table, writing in a notebook. He looked embarrassed when he saw us and I thought that he had suddenly been struck by a line of poetry, as Thisbe sometimes was. She preferred not to be noticed at these moments, so I ignored Patrick and went to look at the potatoes. I moved the fruit pie to the lowest shelf and put in a tin to heat for the Yorkshire pudding. The joint and the potatoes looked all right, and Mother and Father would be coming any moment.

I thought that if Patrick were to appear in his true colours, as Father's guest, he would be more effective sitting by himself in the Room than helping us to cook the lunch, but I couldn't think how to get him there. He was quite happy sitting on the kitchen table, his shoulder close to Thisbe's and with Cressida leaning decoratively against the dresser in front of him. I gave the batter a final flurry and splashed him with milk. I didn't exactly mean to do it, but I did realize that he was in the danger zone and didn't modify my whisking. I couldn't help being glad when it happened, and rather wished that the idle Thisbe had been accidentally splashed too. There is something intensely provoking about people who sit and talk when one is cooking, especially if they seem to forget one is there. Patrick was looking at Cressida and listening to Thisbe and I might as well have been in the moon or my coffin.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but if you *will* sit there you'll probably get splashed. Oh, Patrick! There's some milk on your sleeve! *What* a shame."

Cressida fetched the sink-cloth, which was luckily quite clean and un-smelly that morning. She scrubbed him

solicitously, and I said: "Really, Patrick, you'd much better be a gent and go and sit in the Room."

Thisbe slipped negligently off the table and fixed her dark eyes on his face. "Shall I show you the way?" she said. "Morgan would be much happier without us."

"If you're sure I can't help," said Patrick to me.

"Certain," I said. "Much better wait in the Room. Father will be back soon, and he's the person you want to see."

"Not him alone," protested Patrick politely, but Thisbe had grasped my point. "Come on," she said. "I'll give you the *Observer* to read," and she took him by the elbow and led him away.

"*Well*," said Cressida, as the door shut behind them. "Considering he's *your* find, I do think Thisbe needn't——"

"Thank you, darling," I said. "But I wanted to get rid of him. If only he'll seem mostly interested in Father——"

Cressida nodded. "Oh yes, I see. Then Thisbe'd better leave him alone in there."

"She will," I said confidently.

She did, too, but not until ten minutes later when she shot into the kitchen and said: "They're just coming. I've left him. Now what?"

I said: "Wait till they're inside and then appear from this direction and say there's a man in the Room who's dying to meet Father, and so I—no, *Teresa* asked him to call."

"Teresa?"

"Yes, she's sure to greet him as a long-lost. Say he's a writer."

"Then Father will think he's a reporter."

"Say he's not."

"But *isn't* he a journalist?" said Cressida.

"Not that sort. Hurry, Thisbe."

She only nodded and slipped out as the front door slammed.

Cressida and I began to lay the table. On Sundays we

have lunch properly in the dining-room instead of the kitchen. We didn't lay a place for Patrick, but we put all the things he would need in a drawer, so that we could whip them out if Mother told us he was to stay to lunch. Then we decided that such speed would be suspicious, and put them all away again. Then we waited.

After a bit Thisbe came coolly out of the Room. "Leaving them to it," she said laconically, and went upstairs.

The Yorkshire pudding had risen beautifully and was agreeably black round the edges. I was painfully hungry, for I have never been one of those who cannot enjoy the food they've themselves cooked. "I wish," I said to Cressida, "that he'd either go or stay."

"I expect he's angling unsuccessfully," she said. "Listen, Morgan! They've opened the door!"

They had indeed. I heard Father's voice in the hall, and then he came along the passage. "I've asked that young man to stay to lunch, so you'd better lay another place."

"Oh, Father!" I said. "There won't be enough potatoes!"

He looked at me rather suspiciously. "Good for your figure," he said, and went back to Mother and Patrick.

"It worked!" I said in awe. "Oh, Cressida, hold your horses tight! Whatever we do we mustn't spoil it now."

"It really depends on him," she said.

I agreed. "If he asks Father's advice as a young writer he'll be all right. *No* one is kinder than old Pop, bless his little heart. For goodness' sake, take a lot of potatoes, Cress, or he'll notice that there are plenty."

Cressida nodded. She is not the sort that gets fat. "Better not serve them round the joint," she advised.

"No, in a vegetable dish. Just a minute while I stir this gravy and then we'll eat."

"I'll lay his place," said Cressida. "By Father, do you think?"

"No, you oaf, of course he must sit by Mother."

Cressida's voice climbed: "I know the rules as well as you do, but as it's Father he's meant to be visiting——"

"Nevertheless," I said with finality, and she shrugged her shoulders and went to lay the extra place.

I was frightfully happy and very glad that the lunch looked and smelt so good. I wondered, though, what we should all talk about.

I need not have worried. Patrick was perfect, deferring to Father without being in the least smarmy, and paying only normally polite attention to us. He was nicest to Teresa and she (good little thing), after her initial greeting, had subsided into smiles, and never mentioned the Old Mill Café. It turned out that Patrick was staying with cousins in the neighbourhood, but I don't think the fact that they were titled cousins weighed in his favour. He seemed rather surprised that we'd never met them, though he'd heard enough from me that morning to know the sort of life we led. He must have been awfully perceptive, for I'd not even hinted at Mother's reactions to Followers, and yet he hardly glanced at any of us, nor did he insist on helping to wash up.

Thisbe took coffee into the Room, and reported that Father was still doing most of the talking. It must be good for him to have a man to talk to, she said, and he was certainly relishing the unusual treat. Mother had gone up to rest, leaving her coffee untasted, but we weren't worried, as she often did that.

After a bit I went in and drank Mother's cold coffee while Father talked, and Patrick stared abstractedly at me. Remembering the poem he was writing, I turned my head to what I thought the best angle. I longed to inspire him. Once, when Father was hunting for a book he wanted to show Patrick, and I had got up to help him, I turned suddenly and surprised Patrick scribbling again. When the book was found I sat down, arranging my head against a large cushion, and closed my eyes, so as not to embarrass him if he wanted to have a good look.

A few minutes later he got up to go and I said good-bye languidly from my chair, while Father saw him out and was actually heard inviting him to look in again. I was so stimulated by the turn of events that I went straight back to the kitchen and began to make a cake for tea.

CHAPTER X

POOR Teresa. It fell to me to take her along for her first French lesson, and I've never seen anyone in such a miserable dither. She even forgot her atheism, the night before, and prayed, in a piercing whisper, for illness. She thought I was asleep, and I lay still, because there was nothing I could do to comfort her. She is a friendly person, really, but our shut-in way of living had given her a great fear of schools or even classes, and I must admit that a French lesson in a Convent would have shaken even me.

To keep up her courage, as we walked down the main road, I made her play a time-worn game. We guessed what would be the next thing we met (car, lorry, bicycle, and so on) and scored points. You took it in turns to have first guess, and it was very exciting if a pedestrian (10 points) was only a few yards away, and a car (5) was coming up behind. You lost 20 points for hesitating. It's rather a good game, but not as interesting with only two players as it is with five. Teresa's concentration was hopeless this morning and I won easily, despite trying to cheat myself. I would back a slow old woman, walking with a basket, and let Teresa bet on a bicyclist coming up fast, and then, before it reached us the bicycle would stop, and the old woman would annoy me by winning. Teresa said plaintively that I had all the luck, and I entirely agreed with her.

It was a stuffy, misty, pale grey sort of morning, and everything dripped. I kept on being bright and gay, but it was no good. Teresa was far too patient to tell me to shut up; she smiled feebly, with brimming eyes, and answered in husky monosyllables. Anyone would have thought her nearest and dearest lay dead in heaps, and of course it was quite absurd of her to feel like that, but the poor child couldn't help it.

When we turned up the road to the Convent she said: "You won't leave me, Morgan?"

I didn't know what to answer. Father was paying for one Miss Harvey, not two, to have "French conversation," and if I stayed with Teresa throughout her lesson I couldn't help learning a little French, could I? Perhaps, like Betsinda in the *Rose and the Ring*, I might learn more than the accredited pupil. I said: "We'll see, darling. I'll stay if I can. Anyway, I'll come in with you."

"What on earth does one *call* a Nun?"

"I don't know, but I expect she'll tell us."

We turned in at the Convent gate, which, far from being bolted and barred, was exactly like all the other gates in the road. A short curved drive led between grass plots, hollies and yew trees to a very ordinary red brick house, with no more stained glass about it than one expects in that type of building. We rang the bell. It was one of the old-fashioned pull-out sort that either doesn't ring at all or rings much too loudly for several seconds. Under my treatment it did first one and then the other. Teresa and I blushed at the noise and longed to run away. We waited. The building was unnaturally quiet for a school. "Perhaps," said Teresa, "they're not expecting us. Oh—Morgan! Let's go, shall we?"

But then the door opened, and a thin little old nun, with three teeth, peeped out like a mouse.

"*Est-ce que*——" I stammered.

"Good morning, my child," she said.

"I've brought my sister for her French lesson."

"Ah, my child, but you have come to the wrong house!" She swished down the steps and led us on to the gravel. "The *next* house," she said. "At the next house they will be expecting you, my children! It is only a few steps," and with her kind old smile she patted our shoulders and tripped nimbly up the well-scrubbed steps again.

"Come on," I said grimly.

We went out on to the road and turned in at the next

gate. The lay-out of lawn and drive was the same, and the house, built of the same red bricks in a different design, was obviously the work of the same, honest, late Victorian builder. The bell was identical in appearance and behaviour.

This time, quite a young nun appeared, a tall dark girl with a pretty doll-like face. She led us into a bare, highly-polished hall, and thence into a room where she left us. There was a gas fire, turned low, a marble fireplace, and on the marble stood a combined clock and crucifix, which impressed me deeply. Teresa, however, was past smiling; she just said, "Yes, isn't it?" and stood as though growing out of the parquet floor, while I made a tour of the sacred pictures and examined some aspidistras by the window.

Then the shiny, chocolate-coloured door opened and in came (as we discovered) la Sœur Marie-Sabine.

She was a sandy-coloured woman, with a very sweet smile, spoiled by gleaming false teeth whose scarlet gums tended to slip down and leave little dark gaps above them. She had faded blue eyes, a slight sandy moustache and no eyebrows. Where these should have been her skin looked red and scrubbed, so that I wondered if she had shaved her eyebrows as well as her head. Did they really shave their heads, I wondered in revulsion, gazing at the edge of her starched head-dress? She had the sweetest and most gentle voice, and she called Teresa "Petite," pronouncing the second e, as singers do. We should call her "Ma sœur" she said, in reply to my stammering question. She spoke only French.

We sat down on three hard little chairs and she asked Teresa questions, about her home, her brothers and sisters ("*Tiens! No* brother!") and had she a dog or a cat? Teresa waited for me to answer and when I stared silently at the little blue gas flames she squeaked barely intelligible "*ouis*" and "*nons.*" I wondered if she was as ashamed of her accent as I was, or if she didn't hear how odd it sounded. Sœur Marie-Sabine sat with three deep furrows

across her scrubbed brow, and an expression of kindly bewilderment. These children, she must have been thinking, were extremely curious!

She produced a book—I remember that it was all about a Curé, and that there were some very old, very insipid illustrations. She read a page, asked if it was understood, and passed the book to Teresa. Teresa tried to pass it to me. I clasped my hands on my lap and resisted the impulse to hit her. Sœur Marie-Sabine told her to read. Teresa's eyes were full of tears and she could hardly see the words. She stammered, stumbled, sniffed and mopped her nose. Shame, which could not dry her tears, added to her misery, and she muttered something about "*un rhume bien sévère.*" Sœur Marie-Sabine appeared to fall for this and she went out of the room for some eucalyptus. Teresa was so ashamed of her tears that we both pretended, in the nun's absence, that she really did have a cold. I glanced surreptitiously at my watch. Only forty minutes to go, I told myself grimly.

Eucalyptus was liberally applied to our handkerchiefs (Teresa's was so saturated already that it was a wonder it absorbed any) and then Sœur Marie-Sabine suggested that she should go on reading. Teresa said: "*Je ne puis pas,*" and pushed the book at me. "Oh, Morgan, it *is* your turn, really!" The book fell on the floor, and I suddenly felt I couldn't bear any more. I stood up and said haltingly: "*Il faut que j'irai maintenant, acheter des choses dans la ville. Ma mère m'a demandé.*" And I bustled out of the room so quickly that neither of them had time to answer me.

My shoes sounded embarrassingly loud in that bare clean hall. I got to the front door and escaped thankfully on to the gravel. The place was *far* too clean, I thought morosely. If they spent all their time polishing, how could they pray properly? Someone was playing five-finger exercises upstairs. I bet they teach them badly, I thought. What a ghastly piano. I pictured a sallow, rabbit-toothed child in a gym-tunic. Her exercises were slipshod in the

extreme. Perhaps they'd like to have *me* as a teacher, I thought.

Then I was out on the road and breathing deep thankful breaths of liberty. I turned briskly towards the shops, equally angry with myself and with Teresa. Silly little jellyfish, sitting blubbering there and trying to pretend she wasn't. She really must learn to control her nerves. She *was* trying, no doubt, but she must just try harder. Horrid of me to leave her. Well, but for heaven's sake, I wasn't a Nanny, was I? I began to whistle "Pop Goes the Weasel" and to walk faster and faster to its air. I don't remember whether people stared at all; probably I never noticed. I arrived in Market Street at a run, and then stopped to think up some shopping, I wanted to go back carrying parcels.

Perhaps I could buy a comforting present for Teresa. I would go and look into Burgess's window, and try to find her a book. I hadn't looked at her as I made my escape, but I knew just what I should have seen if I had, an "*et tu Brute*" look of anguished intensity. Blast the child; if Pandora could see the exhibition she was making of herself this morning she'd stop talking about boarding schools and think rather of mental homes!

I stopped dead (and a pram ran into me from behind, rather hurting my right calf). Oh dear, I hadn't meant that! Of course I hadn't! Darling Teresa was only suffering from an attack of nerves, and I could remember being exactly the same myself at the dentist when I was her age. Involuntary tears had flowed unceasingly down my cheeks throughout his deft and kindly ministrations, and he hadn't really hurt much. I had suddenly got over this crying business when I was about sixteen, and no doubt Teresa would be like me, poor pet. I hastened to Burgess's determined to buy her something really nice, and I refused to acknowledge that she would rather have my company at this moment than fifty books.

I was examining every book on Burgess's shelves, when

a girl came into the shop. I looked up from *Mr. Rowl* and saw that it was the same girl whom Thisbe and I had seen on horseback. She was hatless, and her light hair was thrust into the upturned collar of a heavy white mackintosh she wore. It was a typically horsey mack, and its full skirt accentuated the smallness of her waist. She'd put a lot of lipstick on her sulky mouth, rather crookedly. Almost hideous, I thought, watching her, as, hands in pockets, she slowly despised every book in sight. But one couldn't deny that there was something about her. Where were all the young men today, I wondered. As she drew near I felt ashamed of *Mr. Rowl* and hurriedly exchanged it for *Crime and Punishment*—a book I detest.

Burgess's is an excellent shop. Mr. Burgess bows you in (he has an especially deep Harvey bow, because of Father) and then he goes back to his desk until it's time to bow you out. The actual selling is done by a dear little dark hunchbacked woman who stays behind the counter, knitting, until you bring to her the books you have chosen. The shelves are admirably arranged, but if for once you can't find what you want, she will say: "On that shelf in the corner, Miss Harvey, in a green dust cover," and continue placidly with her knitting. I have spent an hour at a time in Burgess's, and have always felt welcome even if I wasn't buying anything.

The bored girl stood beside me for a moment, but her eyes never dropped to *Crime and Punishment*. She yawned, very openly, showing beautiful teeth and a remarkably clean tongue, and then she went over to Mr. Burgess and said: "You haven't got anything very thrilling today, have you?" She went out of the shop and Mr. Burgess bowed as low as if she'd been a Harvey.

I put away *Crime and Punishment* and took out *Mr. Rowl* again. "May I have this, please?" I said to the knitter. "I haven't any money with me today, but I have it at home, and I'll bring it some day soon, I promise!" She beamed at me: "That will be quite all right, Miss Harvey," and she packed up the book in an instant.

As Mr. Burgess ushered me out, I said: "Who's the girl who's just gone out?"

"That was the Honourable Suzanne Malfrey," he said impressively, and I said: "Oh, *really*?" I went out, feeling interested. The Malfreys were the titled cousins with whom Patrick sometimes stayed. Did he, I wondered, buzz assiduously round that rather unpleasant girl? I hoped that he had more sense.

The Guild Hall clock said 12.25. I put my watch right, and hurried across the little cobbled market square to take a short cut back to the Convent, for Teresa would be free in five minutes. I passed below the statue of a very prominent writer—prominent in more ways than one, as I could see when I glanced up at the sky-backed profile of his stomach. Visitors always seemed struck by him and would spend hours walking round his home (now a museum) and fingering his desk, his paper-knife and—I supposed—his slippers or his snuff-box. None of us had ever visited the place; it was far too near home.

I clutched *Mr. Rowl* and almost ran up to the Convent. Frightful if I was late, and the Guild Hall wasn't very reliable. I ran up those impeccable steps and hesitated, wondering whether to ring, knock or go straight in. Tentatively, I pushed the door, and followed it when it swung. I tapped inaudibly on the inner shining door, behind which I had left Teresa's misery, but when I went in the room was empty and the gas-fire out. I stopped, staring—what on earth had happened? Had Teresa done a bolt? Or was she ill? What was I to do now? I went into the hall and listened. A very unpleasant electric clock clanked over my head and I jumped. All else was silent. I peered up the bare stairs, and saw only a highly coloured Madonna in a niche. The clock again made me jump. What *was* Teresa doing? Really, the little beast was too inconsiderate for words; I supposed she was punishing me for my desertion.

I looked at the doors round the hall. There were six of

them, five varnished and one at the end covered with red baize. I pushed that one open, and then hesitated, for a waft of cabbage came through and I couldn't believe that Teresa was lurking in the kitchen. I waited self-consciously, while the vile clock continued to announce, every thirty seconds, that this time it was finally broken to bits. I didn't know what to do.

At last I tiptoed across to the front door. It stood open and I sidled through and had my hand on the bell ready to pull and jangle when I heard a door shut upstairs and a mumble of voices. La Sœur Marie-Sabine appeared at the head of the flight, shepherding Teresa, and they began to come down, Teresa clinging to the banisters and looking rather sick.

To my great relief she had stopped crying, and the nun must have been as thankful as we were that the hour was over, for she was smiling happily as she saw me standing below. "There is thy sister," she beamed, patting Teresa's shoulder.

Teresa thanked her and took hold of my arm. We all said "*Au revoir*" and I said "*Merci mille fois, ma sœur,*" and wished that I could tell her how sorry I was about my young sister's behaviour. We went down the steps and I distinctly heard an enormous sigh of relief from the old thing as she turned to go in.

Teresa squeezed my arm and drew deep breaths; she didn't seem at all hurt or annoyed. "Oh, Morgan!" she said, and "Oh, *really*, Morgan!"

"Darling," I said. "What on earth were you doing upstairs?"

"Going to the lav. Wasn't it providential, darling, I suddenly got the sq——" She broke off with a giggle as I shoved my elbow into her side. We were walking along a peopled road and I reckoned she'd said enough.

"You look a bit green," I said, "but you needn't say any more."

"All right, I won't." She giggled again. "A *lovely* L,

Morgan, very like that bell, and all blue china and red mahogany. I could have stayed there for hours."

"*Like* the *bell*?"

"Yes, you pulled a handle. Do you know the sort? I've never seen one before."

"Teresa, has the—the L—completely cheered you up? You are a queer object. Yes, I do know the sort; I like them too."

"It only cheered me up because I had such an awful pain and I knew I could stay there till the hour was over, and anyway I *needed* the place, dammit!"

"Mother hates you saying that."

"Sorry. Morgan, I'm so happy it's all over now, and I'm never going again you know."

"Oh, Teresa! It won't be half so bad next time."

"It's all right, I'm not going. She was rather a nice old nun, wasn't she?"

"How did you get on while I was away? You can't have been having the—you can't have been upstairs all the time."

"She asked me if I'd read any French books."

"And you told her?"

"I told her *Bel-Ami* and *Les Nourritures Terrestres*."

I whistled.

"Yes," said Teresa, "I think she'd have liked to do that. I'm afraid it wasn't quite true, anyway, about the Gide. I stuck quite early on. Was that awfully cheating of me? I thought she'd be impressed, but she said she hadn't read either of them. I thought *everyone* did!"

"Not nuns. You didn't mention Proust, did you?"

"Oh dear! No, I quite forgot."

"Never mind, I don't expect she'd have read that either. Teresa, why do you wade through books you don't understand or enjoy?"

"We haven't any other French books in the house, and Father enjoys them so I know they're good."

"Well, *I* can't be bothered with them," I said, "but I

think when I'm lots older—thirty or forty—perhaps they'll mean something to me. I don't believe Father wants you to tackle them at fifteen."

"He doesn't mind," said Teresa comfortably.

She remained quite unruffled while we waited for our bus, apparently certain that her ordeal was over for good. In fact, she looked so pink and contented that I began to suspect her of engineering that providential interruption to her lesson. Our bus creaked in and stopped. A few passengers got out, and so did the driver and the conductor. Teresa and I climbed in and sat in the front on the left where there was little leg-room but a good view. Teresa was chattering on with some relish about the awfulness of anyone's deciding to be a nun when suddenly her face froze and she assumed the look of one listening to a sound no one else can hear.

"Oh, Morgan! Oh dear. Have I time to go to the Old Mill Café Ladies' Room?"

I looked at my watch and shook my head. "No, darling. If you want to go anywhere you'd better go to the public one down in the bowels of the market place."

"Beast," said Teresa. "Don't talk about bowels!"

She couldn't be very bad I thought, if she could joke like that. "Anyway," I said, "we'll be home in ten minutes."

"So we will." Teresa settled down and began to look pink again.

But the journey home was most unnerving. Every time the bus stopped, Teresa said she *must* get out, and then she dithered and left it until too late, and said she'd get out next time. She grew greener and greener and I became more and more cross. At the same time, I could not doubt that she was genuinely suffering.

I was almost as thankful as she was when we arrived safely home. She didn't appear at lunch, but had a cup of Bovril in bed, with a hot-water bottle on the part of her that she wouldn't let me speak about, and *Mr. Rowl* to keep her happy. Mother was rather concerned about her,

and took her own plate of pudding up, to sit and eat it at Teresa's bedside.

I began to think that little T. would win through and escape all further French lessons. In any case, I was quite determined that *I* would never take her to the Convent again. Let Pandora, who was so keen on Teresa's education, just come and try it for herself.

CHAPTER XI

THE first of February made me feel that winter was over. I was wrong, of course, but it was a happy feeling, and lasted for a day or two, while the sun popped in and out among small bright clouds and snowdrops dangled in exquisite little clumps under the bare beeches.

I had actually succeeded in saying hares *and* rabbits, which is something I've very seldom managed to do. Teresa and I got into bed at the same moment on the thirty-first of January, and ceremoniously said "Hares" to each other. Then I thought of something else to say, and after we'd exchanged a few sentences we had to say "Hares" again. Then it was Teresa who wanted to speak; she said that we might both get letters in the morning (probably from Pandora) but she couldn't believe that we should get parcels, could I? I said: "Wait and see if we say 'Rabbits.' It's awfully difficult to collect one's thoughts in time. Hares."

Teresa said: "I'm jolly well going to this time. I shall go to sleep thinking 'Rabbits, rabbits, rabbits,' and I shall dream of them, flocks of them all woolly and sweet——"

"Not woolly, furry. Hares."

"Furry, if you like, with pink noses and twitching whiskers, jumping about on a grassy hill among the daisies. Then I'm sure to think of them first in the morning. Hares."

"I'm afraid I don't wake up thinking of anything much, unless I've been frightfully worried and had it on my mind all night."

"This will be a *nice* thing to have on my mind," said Teresa.

"M'm. They're all right. Rabbits."

"They taste good too. Rabbits."

I was almost asleep when Teresa said urgently: "Morgan! Not rabbits yet! Hares!"

"Hares," I muttered obediently.

In the morning I woke rather late. There were birds singing and I could hear an argument developing between Thisbe and Cressida, one of whom was in the kitchen and the other in her bedroom, so that they were stating their views with full lung power. They sounded quite amicable and were only discussing the odd disappearance of Mother's second tray-cloth (Cressida was getting the breakfast tray ready for her).

I lay listening, and considered how to put in my word on a subject about which I'd really no views. I decided to blame the absent Mrs. Phillips, and was just summoning the wakefulness needed for a colossal scream to that effect from my attic when something—I wonder what?—made me say "Rabbits" instead. I didn't even know I was going to say it until it was safely said. What a triumph!

I heard Cressida yell: "All right, darling! I've found it. It was in the dresser drawer." And I turned my attention to Teresa.

"Rabbits, Teresa!" I said urgently. "Come on, darling, say rabbits. Rabbits, Teresa, rabbits!"

Teresa moaned, turned over, and said "Cows!"

She was rather hurt about it afterwards, and maintained that she'd have said Rabbits all right if I hadn't muddled her with my officious advice. But there it was; no parcel.

As it happened, the only people to have letters that morning were Father and Thisbe, but Teresa knew she would get hers soon and I had a silly sort of feeling that I really might have a parcel. Not wishing to be superstitious, I said portentously that I was a great believer in Coincidence.

All this nonsense started February off well for me, and we had a few warm days, went for walks, and watched the buds swelling. Mother came with me one day, and a walk with her is always a revelation as she sees all sorts of little

things in the hedgerows that no one else would notice. Sometimes, too, she would walk for a few yards with her eyes shut, and her lovely tragic face upturned to the air, as though its touch upon her brought peace. Oh, darling Mother! If only I could have come near to her, could have understood her sorrowful isolation and relieved it with my love.

On the afternoon when Patrick turned up again, Mother had gone by train, with Cressida and Teresa, to an industrial town some thirty miles away, where lived and practised our dentist.

The extraordinary Teresa went off in good spirits, looking forward to the train journey, and to a little bit of shopping, and to tea in a café. Mother looked, as she always looks, untidily magnificent, and clearly she was too old—or too preoccupied—to be afraid of a little pain. Only Cressida was rather tight over the cheekbones, and that was hardly surprising as her beautiful little teeth. for all their looks, give her endless trouble, and she was afraid she'd be having a wisdom tooth out.

When Thisbe and I had washed up the lunch things, and had sat on with Father in the kitchen for a few moments talking contentedly of nothing much, Father gave an unbridled yawn and went upstairs to work. He had been relaxed and happy, and we were sorry when he went, for it is seldom that Father lingers after a meal. He has always seemed to have some driving compulsion forcing him back to his typewriter after the shortest interval.

Thisbe said: "Have you ever wondered, Morgan, *why* Father works so frightfully hard?"

"Well, I suppose he wants to," I said. "Wants to, and needs the money."

"But, Morgan, have you any conception how much he earns?"

"No, I haven't. Have you?"

"Well, it must be an awful lot. Can you think of any other writer in English who is read as much? He somehow combines being a best-seller (a *continuous* best-seller) with writing really good books. No one else can come near him."

"No, there's no one else in his class. Oh well, I don't know, taxation I suppose—what does it matter?"

"Only that I'd like to see him having more holidays, dear thing, and being a bit extravagant now and then."

"Oh, Thisbe, he *is* extravagant! His idea of buying a shirt is to write to the Stores for a dozen of the most expensive they have!"

"But he could afford to keep expensive mistresses, and own theatres and race-horses—or at least I should think he could."

"You don't want him to, do you?" I said, laughing.

"No, bless him. But look at the way we live, Morgan. No car, even, and only Mrs. Phillips to clean!"

"I suppose it is odd," I said, "I've never thought about it. Well, anyway, you can't say he's mean."

"Oh no, indeed he's not. He hasn't any of the miserly characteristics at all (look at that ring he gave Mother the other day!) But, all the same, there's something there that I don't understand. I have a theory that he has a very big capital saved, for some reason. Do you remember how worried he seemed when there was all that talk about a capital levy?"

"No," I said blankly. "What *is* a capital levy?"

"Ignorant little beast," said Thisbe dispassionately. "You should read the papers." She got up and yawned, like Father. "Oh well, if he can be industrious at his age, I suppose I can at mine." She went to the door. "See you later."

I was rather disappointed. Thisbe didn't often talk to me as if I were a real grown-up, and I knew that I owed this honour to Pandora's absence. A pity I hadn't known about capital levies. Anyhow, it was good to have come close to

the real, the elusive, serious Thisbe for once. I decided I'd gather some kindling and think over all she'd said.

I went outside and looked fondly up at the front of the house. The two attics whose dormer windows faced this way were used as boxrooms, now that we had no servants, and they were only slightly inferior to my own attic bedroom. Instead of the garden and the water-works chimney, they looked over the field with its beech trees to Mrs. Phillips's little red cottage in the distance. If only I were an artist, instead of a pianist, I thought, I would ask to have one of those rooms for a studio. One boxroom ought to be enough for any household, and they were only getting more and more full of junk. The lawn and drive were littered with twigs, and I began to break them and arrange them in my basket. "Seven, eight, lay them straight." How would it be to have a music-room of my own in the attics? If Father were really rich perhaps he could afford to buy me another piano all to myself. And Thisbe could share the studio, making it a writing-music-room, removed from the little interruptions of life downstairs.

It would certainly sound well, when Patrick, for instance, came to call. "I'm sorry, but Morgan is in her work-room and cannot be disturbed. Would you like to wait?" But, oh dear, what nonsense. Thisbe might enjoy the solitude, but I knew perfectly well that I should hate it. I was always charmed to be interrupted when I was practising, and I liked company, and the feeling that I was in the centre of things. Besides, I'd never like a new piano as much as the dear Bechstein.

The twigs were greened over and rotten; they'd be little use as firewood. I persisted, however, because the obvious alternative was to walk across to the kitchen garden, at the Phillips's cottage. There was sure to be something to do there, for it was far too big for Phillips's efforts, and Cressida, with her market-gardening, complicated the affair by disagreeing with most of his theories. In fact, they didn't work together at all but kept a path between them—

a path bordered on Phillips's side with snapdragons and forget-me-nots, and on Cressida's with sweet-williams, Mrs. Simkins and primroses. But the grumbling Phillips was ordered by Father to do any heavy digging or manuring that Miss Cressida requested, and this he naturally loathed. It was not a very satisfactory arrangement.

I filled my basket and took it into the kitchen. I decided to fill it again, this time with beech twigs, and then to go in and practise. I swung on the gate as I went into the field, and then sauntered over to the first group of trees. They were big and very beautiful, their silvery trunks streaked with black and their great boughs perfect (I'd always thought) for climbing, if only they had been within reach of the ground. How often as a child, confident that I had lately added inches to my height, had I mounted those splay roots, where little black pools of rain-water lay, and vainly spread my arms round a huge trunk. I dropped my basket and took a cautious upward step. I had always thought that if I could get my knee into that fork, and at the same time, with my right hand, catch at that limbless stump up *there*——

Five minutes later I was proudly seated on a high branch, and could look over great tracts of unexplored country, or so it seemed. I was not actually higher than the attic windows, but I had a completely new view of the house and the countryside, and I could see the familiar places below with fresh and romantic eyes, as though I were looking from a train. The sweep of the drive was like a child's model, and I could see right over the stable, the coach-house and the big barn, to the crooked pear tree in the big field beyond, the sharp line of the railway cutting, and, of course, Wools church. If only a train would come now, I should be in bliss.

I wasn't interested in the monotonous flow of cars past our garden wall, and I didn't even notice when one of them stopped. But I did hear the clang of the iron gate, and looked down, expecting to see the fishmongers' super-

cilious young man, and wishing I had a stone to shy at his white enamel tray. It was a moment before I recognized Patrick, a squat figure in the despised mackintosh, walking up to the front door. I shrieked at him: "Oy, Patrick! Bet you don't know where *I* am!" And as he rotated in bewilderment on the gravel, looking in all the wrong places, I thought how horrified Cressida would have been, and blessed that poor girl's wisdom tooth.

Patrick carried a despatch case, which gave him an air of grown-up preoccupation. When he saw me he looked round for the field gate, and not seeing it (it leads from the yard and was hidden from him by a low wall and a lot of lilac trees) he put down the case and vaulted neatly over the iron fence. I had a vision of him climbing gallantly up the tree to join me, and I wished it were something more blossomy—and less greening to the hands and seat—than a beech. I should have liked to have leant my little wild-rose laughing face down to him, with spilt petals of some sort in my dark hair.

Wrong time of year, however, wrong tree and—as it turned out—wrong young man. I called: "Come on up!" And he said: "Not on your life. You come down." So, with a feeling of disappointment, I started to grope my way from branch to branch, wishing quite passionately that I were wearing my corduroy slacks.

Blast the young man! There he stood, calmly supervising my descent, and instead of feeling dare-devil, picturesque, wild-roseish and so on, I was conscious of nothing but my short skirt and not very helpful pants. However, presumably he was gentlemanly enough to turn away if necessary; I hoped that I could trust him.

I came to the last bough, turned, jumped and was caught. But instead of holding me for a moment longer than was necessary, he propped me up briskly, looked piercingly at my face (which felt red) and said: "Go and get yourself cleaned up, you little disgrace. I want to talk to you. Thisbe in?"

"Working," I said with gratification, "and not to be disturbed!"

Patrick grunted. "Who is in?"

"Only Father, and he's working too. But I expect they'll both emerge for tea." I led the way to the Room, with the dignity of a camel to offset badly torn stockings, and left him there, with his despatch case. Suppressing my meaner instincts, I put my head round Thisbe's door and said: "Patrick's downstairs."

Thisbe, who was writing slowly with one hand, and pulling her hair with the other, looked startled. "I'll come down," she said, and then added: "—at least—not yet, but later on. Don't let him go just yet, will you?"

I'd no intention of letting him go, and I said so. Then I rushed to the bathroom and scrubbed myself violently.

When I came downstairs, ten minutes later, I meant to startle Patrick with my altered personality. I was therefore dressed in a soft blue woollen frock, demurely collared and cuffed, and instead of hurling myself down the polished flights I walked decorously, in case he was in the hall. But he wasn't; the Room's door was shut, and Patrick, inside, was playing "Allouette" softly on the piano.

I came and stood beside him with my hands loosely clasped in front of me. I looked at him wide-eyed, and said: "I'm cleaner now, Patrick."

He had a good look at me, approving but rather detached, I thought. Then he said: "Do you photograph well, Morgan?"

"Me?" I said, startled to find that he wasn't detached, after all.

"You and—well, all of you. As a family."

"I don't know," I said. "We're none of us awfully expert with a camera. Teresa does best, I think, with her Brownie. She has some very good ones of the house and garden."

"Queen Anne," muttered Patrick.

"William and Mary," I corrected him proudly.

He said: "Really? William and Mary—I'll remember."

"Would you like to see the family album?" I said hopefully.

"Would I!" said Patrick, with real enthusiasm; then he glanced at his watch, looked nervous, and said: "That is, a little later on, but there's someone waiting outside for me."

"Is there? Won't he come in?"

"If you invite him. He's—as a matter of fact he's a photographer."

"Not a *professional* photographer," I said awed. "I've never seen one!"

"Haven't you, darling?" said Patrick absently. He seemed anxious, and I couldn't convince myself that he'd meant the endearment. "Well, say the word and I'll bring him in."

"Patrick," I said, "we can't afford it, and I'm sure you can't. Where does he come from?" Patrick jerked his thumb. "London! But he'll be terribly expensive!"

"You don't need to worry about that. Look, Morgan, would your Father let us take one or two of him?"

"Oh, I don't think so." I stared at him, trying to adjust my ideas. "Patrick, what are you up to?"

"You'd better read it," said Patrick. He opened his despatch case and took out a great many sheets of typescript, neatly clipped together. He wrote "William and Mary" in the second paragraph, crossing out "Queen Anne," and then handed the bundle to me. He looked self-conscious, I remember, both proud and shy.

I'm ashamed to say that my first feeling was of pleasure that he should have written all these pages about us, the Harveys. Then, as I glanced through it, the full horror of the thing slowly dawned on me. Patrick was a Traitor, a Wolf, a Fifth-Columnist who had wriggled himself into an innocent household. He hadn't been interested in me —in us—for ourselves at all, but only as copy for some

horrible paper. Father would never forgive him, and I should certainly never forgive myself.

"Patrick," I said with deadly calm, "you must burn this."

"Burn it? But, you little idiot, it's good!"

"You can't possibly publish it."

"Can't I? What's the matter with it, anyway?"

"It's simply frightful!" I said. I flipped over the pages in desperation. "You've—oh, Patrick!—you've even got that old story of Father pushing his suitcase round London on a wheelbarrow!"

"It's a good story. You told it to me."

I looked round for an escape, and would have left the room had Patrick not seized me by the shoulders and pushed me into a chair. "Now listen," he said severely, "suppose instead of going up in the air like this you *read* the thing, and then see how you feel. It's a good honest bit of work and it's going to a very respectable weekly"—he named it—"and there's absolutely nothing in it that you can possibly resent. Come on, Morgan, be fair."

Appealed to like that, I had to give way. I started with a sigh at page one of the typescript and read to the end. And I had to admit that it was good. As a tribute to Father, indeed, it was more than good; homage could not have been more gracefully given or with more discernment. There was none of the "He and I" business, that I find so distasteful in many articles of the kind. Patrick left himself right out of the article, and when he came to us—Father's family—he was not arch, nor did he make us sound like advertisements for face cream. I think a stranger reading his words would have pictured us as an unusual rather than a peculiar family. He spoke of Mother's "unique dignity and beauty of bone structure," but he made no mention of her eccentricity. Even Father, I thought, would like his unaffected English, and his almost loving description of the dear house.

"Patrick," I said, mollified. "I'm sorry if I was unfair. But——"

"You were, very."

"Yes, well I *am* sorry. But you know Father will never stand for this."

"Surely, Morgan, even your Father can do with an occasional bit of publicity."

"Oh *no*!" I said, shocked. "Father's quite above that sort of thing!"

"That," said Patrick, "is his legend, his line, as I very well know. The man who never goes out to meet his public, is never seen in London restaurants, refuses invitations to the most classy literary 'do's' and never never gives interviews to journalists. But don't you see that I've respected all that? I have not pricked the bubble in the slightest. I've not made this look like an interview; I've not asked for his views on existentialism and the hydrogen bomb, or the modern trend in detective fiction and short hair for women. I've simply given a very restrained portrait of the man's home and family, with just a few words about him, as a tribute. I haven't even"—Patrick gazed at me reproachfully—"allowed myself to say that he has the loveliest lot of daughters you could possibly imagine. Don't look self-conscious, Morgan, you know perfectly well it's true. But if I wrote down half what I felt on that subject it would sensationalize the whole tone of the article, and anyway no one would believe me."

I nodded meekly, unable to find words.

"Look, now," he went on, "just persuade your Father to *read* this—no commitments—and see what happens. Will you, Morgan? It really does mean a lot to me."

"Father will never forgive me for telling you all those stories."

"Rubbish. All great men like to remember their early struggles, and I've only given them a few lines, in passing."

"That's all quite true," I said, and I suddenly began to

feel hopeful. After all, I thought, we got little or no satisfaction from our position as the daughters of a celebrity. It would be fun to see this article in print, fun to have people like Gregory gaping at it, and of course I was dying to bring in that photographer. I wondered how he would want us to pose? From the tone of the article I was afraid he would want us to wear jumpers and skirts, or even aprons, but I had a violent longing to be photographed in my white velvet dress. Perhaps Patrick could arrange it. I made up my mind. "All right," I said with a sigh. "I'll take it up to Father and see what I can do."

"God bless you," said Patrick earnestly, and he escorted me to the door. I paused for a moment, to ask about the white dress, but something mercifully kept me silent, and I left him with a smile and went slowly upstairs.

Outside Father's door I stopped to listen. The typewriter was silent and I could hear no movement. Would he be angry at the interruption? I was tempted to go down and tell Patrick that he must come back for his answer tomorrow, but the thought of that photographer drove me forward. I drew a few deep breaths to calm myself, and tapped lightly on the door.

CHAPTER XII

FATHER promptly called "Come in!", so he couldn't have been deeply absorbed. I opened the door and stepped down into the room.

I saw at once that I was lucky, for he was correcting proofs, a job he detested and with which I often helped him. He looked up, smiling, and said: "Good girl, Morgan. Come to help? How did you know I was at it?"

I said: "I will, Father, of course, but I didn't know and I've really come about something else."

"Have you?" Father fixed on me his light blue eyes that looked so piercing and really saw so little that went on in his house. "Nice frock, Morgan!" He sounded surprised. "New?"

"*No*, darling, anything but. Look, d'you remember Patrick True?"

"Patrick True? Oh, yes, the dark chap—I liked him."

"He's downstairs."

"Is he?" Father looked at his watch. "Well I'm sorry, old thing, but I can't come down just now, you'll have to keep him happy for me. I'll come down in half an hour. Has he brought anything for me to see?"

"Anything——?"

"He said he'd bring me something he was writing."

Here it came! I said nervously: "Well, yes, Father. But it's——" I became silent, showing him the typescript in my hand.

"Ah. Wonder if it's any good. Seems an intelligent chap. Well, give it to me, Morgan. Why are you holding on to it like that?"

"Father, just promise me something."

"What?"

"Read it right through before you decide."

"I won't promise anything of the sort. If it's trash I shall

know it on the first page and I won't waste my time ploughing through it. Here, give it me like a good girl and don't stand there goggling in that half-witted way." He took the typescript from my enfeebled hand and started to read it.

I decided to run. But before I got to the door Father said "*Morgan!*" in the voice of an indignant lion, and I stopped dead. "Do you," said Father, speaking from his shoes, "know what's in this article?"

"Yes."

"And you wanted me to read it right through?"

"Yes, Father, because——"

"My *God*!" When Father calls on God he really means it. "I can hardly believe you could behave in such a stupid, undignified, common way!"

"Oh, Father——!" I was still facing the door, and I blinked in a violent but useless attempt to stem my tears.

"You introduce a journalist into this house, without warning me, and then you have the effrontery to bring me this—this Disgustingness with your *own hands*"—my own hands seemed to make it much worse—"and ask me to read it."

"Father," I squeaked, "it really isn't disgusting. You oughtn't to judge it without reading it."

"Don't you tell me what I ought to do!" bellowed Father. "I won't have it! I'm not going to tear this—this *mess* in half because that would be childish, but you can take it down to your precious Patrick True and tell him that if he prints a word of it, I'll sue him for libel."

I blew my nose violently. "You couldn't," I said indistinctly. "There isn't a thing in it that you could object to. And, Father, he *needn't* have shown it to you. He could have published it straight away and made a lot of money out of it. You're news, you know."

Father is a very just man and he didn't know about the waiting photographer. He said: "You're right, Morgan, it was decent of him to submit it to me first. But all the same,

to sneak into a house as a friend, as a young aspirant writer, and then secretly to produce this—this *tumour* is a thing that no reputable journalist would *dream* of doing!"

"I see, Father."

"Go and tell him to get out and not come back," said Father decisively. "Tell him he can't publish this *Thing*, and he ought to be ashamed of himself. Here, take it." He put a hand on my shoulder and swung me round to face him. "Good gracious, Morgan, your eyes are very bloodshot today. Have you been straining them? I hope you haven't got pink eye, or something. Better go and bathe them, my dear; they're precious."

He gave me Patrick's article and pushed me quietly out of the room, whereupon I sat on the stairs and wept, laughing a little at the same time. How could anyone be so *stupid*, I thought with affectionate rage! Bloodshot eyes, indeed, and so kindly concerned about it and never realizing that he'd made me cry! Well, anyway, he hadn't recognized the shameful tears when he saw them, so I wasn't entirely humiliated. None of us has ever been so lost to decency as to sob before Father; I expect if we did we could have anything from him we wanted.

Thisbe came down the white steps from her bedroom on to the landing. "Moping?" she said casually, before she saw my face.

"No, no," I said, "must have got a cold. Give this to Patrick, will you, and tell him it's no good; he can't print it and he'd better tell the photographer to go away." My voice cracked, and I cleared my throat ostentatiously. "And tell him I did my best, Thisbe, but Father says he's to go away and not come back. Say I'm sorry!"

Thisbe raised her delicate eyebrows. "You *have* got a cold," she said, well knowing that I hadn't. "All right, I'll cope with him. You go and lie down, and I'll bring you a cup of tea later." She went calmly downstairs and I dragged myself miserably up to my attic.

Later when Thisbe brought my tea, I asked her how Patrick had taken it. Very well, she said, although of course he'd been disappointed. He had taken her for a drive and they'd had a long talk, and if we received an invitation from the Malfreys later on we were to accept it if it was the last thing we did.

I think Thisbe tried to cheer me up that evening, but her oblique methods weren't very noticeable, and I remember thinking her rather hard-boiled because she didn't seem to be at all upset herself at the awful thing that had happened. She was unusually gay, in fact, and I must admit that she made Father gay too, although he had come down at sherry time lowering a bit. Patrick was not mentioned by any of us.

I knew instinctively that this was the moment for "days of wrath" (early abandoned last time) and I sat in a corner of the Room, glumly sewing and hating myself. I tried to hate Father and Patrick, which would have been less painful, but I only succeeded in loathing and despising my own stupidity.

When the dentist-goers came home in a taxi I felt that Father would be sure to tell them the dreadful story, but he didn't mention it. He was far too busy pushing Mother into a chair by the fire, taking her coat, giving her some sherry and sending me upstairs for her slippers. Mother was utterly wearied and had the exalted look of one at peace after strenuous effort. She sat with her eyes shut and her delicate hands spread out before the flames, and I wondered if she had looked like that after having her babies. She seemed deeply content, and Father never took his eyes off her. It was seldom that they were apart even for a few hours.

Cressida was tired and talkative. We heard all about the wisdom tooth at some length, and what the dentist had said, and what she had dreamt when she was under gas,

until at last Mother told her rather sharply that we'd had enough. Then she turned scarlet and left the room. Teresa was also full of chatter, but in a gentler voice. Hers was mostly about some puppies that she'd seen in a shop window.

How Mother realized that there was something wrong with me I don't know, but when the others were going to take their coats off, and Thisbe and I started towards the door to get the soup, she called me back. "Stay and talk to me, Morgan." She just glanced at Father, who was stretched out in his enormous chair, and he at once got up, obligingly, gave a grunt and a grin and strode out of the room.

"What is it, darling?" said Mother.

I think if it hadn't been for the photographer and the white velvet frock I should have told her the whole story. But I really could not confess to such childishness and I knew that I'd never manage to tell only part of it. There was the horror, too—from which I kept diverting my thoughts—of my delusion that Patrick was writing a poem about me. Oh no! I couldn't tell Mother anything. I said: "How do you mean?"

"Do leave that disgusting-looking darning for a minute," said Mother, and when I came over she took my hand and held it against her cheek. "Don't take life too hard, will you, my darling?" she said, gazing into the fire. And she added: "Oh, Morgan, what a horrible town! The noises—I can't get them out of my ears. Will you play something for me?"

"Darling, of course! What?"

"Mozart, I think—a sonata," said Mother, and she loosed my hand with a little squeeze. I went over to the piano, and although the music didn't make me quite forget what had happened, it did help me to realize that there were other qualities in me as well as gullibility, and that I was really a comfort and a support to Mother. Playing a gentle resigned little Andante, I wondered whether I

should ever, like her, be refined by suffering into "unique dignity."

Thisbe, bringing in the letters, with Mother's soup and a hunk of cake for herself, put an end to my musings, though not my playing. She drew a little table up for Mother, and sat down—neatly in one piece—on the hearthrug. I started the Allegro.

"Oh, *Thermopylæ*!" said Mother.

For her to interrupt my playing was extraordinary. She was staring with visible dismay at a letter in her hand, and what made the dismay rather funny was her unguarded use of a silly expletive of mine, always fastidiously shunned by the rest of the family.

Thisbe and I giggled, and I left Mozart in mid-air and hurried across the room. "Darling, what on earth?"

"Gregory!" said Mother. "He's coming tomorrow!"

Thisbe and I were speechless, and she went on: "He wrote to me about a week ago fixing the date and I forgot all about it. Children, how simply frightful! He might have come and found us all out and the room not ready!"

By this time we had realized that the Gregory she spoke of was our uncle-in-law. We said: "Oh dear!" and "Oh, Mother, how *awful*!"

Mother was furious with herself. "If he'd turned up with no welcome for him I should never have forgiven myself. Children, you'll help me, won't you? Get Mrs. Phillips to do the spare-room first thing and—but I don't need to tell you," she added, sinking back and taking up her cup. "I know there's no need for me to interfere. He'll be here at twelve-thirty. Father will meet him, I know, and Cressida had better cook the lunch tomorrow—is it her day?"

It wasn't, but Cressida could easily be persuaded to perform.

"I'll come down for lunch," said Mother bravely, and I said, "Oh, darling, we wanted you to stay in bed all day tomorrow."—"No, no, I must come down. He's only coming for a week this time."

"Now thank we all our God," said Thisbe earnestly.

"Don't be unkind, Thisbe. Uncle Gregory is getting very old, and any visit might be his last."

"Not it," muttered Thisbe, but Mother pretended not to hear.

Uncle Gregory managed to surprise us all during that unwelcome stay, but only at the eleventh hour. He started off according to custom, limping rheumatically round the house to look for damp marks, disapproving of Thisbe's slacks, of Teresa's clumping step and of everything about me. He liked Cressida's cooking, and revolted us by his greedy appreciation, until she foolishly boasted about her discreet use of garlic. From that moment he sniffed suspiciously at every dish, demanding her guarantee that it was untainted.

Teresa said that she hated the early mornings most, when she used to take his breakfast up to him. The wizened little man would be in bed with his windows shut, and the room would smell of stale tobacco and Uncle Gregory. He was clean, no doubt, said Teresa fairly, but anyone's room would smell if they'd no fresh air. And then she'd be asked to hand him his teeth. These grinning horrors would be holding a sort of loathsome holiday in a tumbler, and Uncle Gregory would fish them out and scrunch them into position with dreadful dexterity. We all in turn performed these niecely duties, but they hurt Teresa the worst.

My chief complaint was that he would tell us what was wrong with the Arts—all of them. It would be dull to repeat his narrow-minded views, so I will leave them out, but to listen and not reply was a real hardship to me. Thisbe used to fix her dark eyes attentively on his face and then think about something else, but I was always bursting with unspoken arguments, unspoken because Mother had particularly asked me not to argue.

"Poor old boy," said Thisbe, as we went up to bed on

his last evening but one. "He thinks D. H. Lawrence is a modern writer. Who does he think the modern composers are, I wonder? Elgar and Rimsky-Korsakov?"

"I should think Brahms," said Cressida.

"Oh no," I said. "Music's his *subject.* Didn't you hear him writing off Benjamin Britten? I did just tell him that Beethoven was abused in his time for writing discords, but it didn't fizz at all. Oh, how can one *bear* it?"

"It's no good blaming him," said Thisbe. "The poor old stick can't help it."

"But he's no right to set himself up as a judge," I insisted. "No one minds if *he* doesn't like Britten or Henry Moore or whoever he's talking about, but how dare he say that other people are only pretending? That we're all just trying to seem clever?"

"Think of Ruskin," said Thisbe.

"Well, he was a stinker too."

"Lots of quite young people take the same attitude," said Thisbe, "and that's worse." And she chanted:

"I grow old . . . I grow old . . .
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.
Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I will wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
I do not think that they will sing to me."

"Thisbe, what on earth's all that?"

"Someone a bit too modern for Uncle Gregory."

"I don't see the connection——"

"Darling, there isn't any! Do for heaven's sake go and undress. I'm getting into the bath."

Thisbe maddens me sometimes. If only she would explain, and if only I knew for certain when she was joking! I went up to my room and found Teresa reading in bed. "Naughty girl," I said automatically.

"No I'm not!" said Teresa. "I was reading about Uncle Gregory."

"How ghastly for you. What did you find him in—one of Beatrix Potter's?"

"No no, *The Courtier*."

"*The Courtier* again! But, T. darling, what a place to find the old Wizen!"

Teresa hunted through the pages, talking all the time. "Castiglione thinks that as our powers fail we begin to think the world has changed, not ourselves. Here we are:

> " 'Therefore the sweete flowers of delyte fade away in that season out of our harts, as the leaves fall from the trees after harvest, and in steade of open and cleare thoughts, there entreth cloudie and troublous heavinesse, accompanied with a thousand heart-griefes. . . . So that peradventure it were not unprofitable, when now in the colde season the Sunne of our life beginning to draw towards the West, to finde out an arte to teach us to forget.'

"Listen to this bit, Morgan.

> " 'Therefore (me thinke) olde men be like unto them that sayling in a vessell out of an haven beholde the ground with their eyes, and the vessell to their seeming standeth still and the shore goeth; and yet it is cleane contrarie, for the haven, and likewise the time and pleasures, continue still in their estate, and we, with the vessell of mortalitie fleeing away, go one after another through the tempestuous sea, that swalloweth up and devoureth all thinges, neither is it graunted us at any time to come on shore againe, but alwaies beaten with contrarie windes, at the end wee breake our vessell at some rocke.' "

Teresa looked at me triumphantly, and I said soberly: "Thank you, darling, that was lovely. Perhaps I've been a pig about the poor old thing."

"Oh no you haven't. But, Morgan, the thing is—are *we* going to get like that?"

"Not if we can help it. What a horrible thought. Look, I'm older than you; if you see me getting like that, for goodness' sake prod me. Be as brutal as you like."

Teresa promised, and I went thoughtfully down to my bath.

When I told Thisbe about it she said she would come in on the prodding. We would all prod each other, and what was more we would tell our children to do it too. "After all," she pointed out, "Uncle Gregory never had any children. I suppose Mother was the nearest thing to a child that he and Aunt Agnes had."

I nodded. "And she wouldn't prod."

Next day when Uncle Gregory said it rained more nowadays than it used to when he was young, and probably that accounted for the insipid taste of all modern vegetables (that and inferior methods of farming), I managed to listen with respectful sympathy, and I think Mother was pleased with me.

On his last morning we were doubly cheered, for not only were we getting rid of our uncle, but also an invitation had come for us from Patrick's posh relatives. Lady Malfrey requested the pleasure of the company of the Misses Harvey at a cocktail party on the 27th of February. We wondered whether it would be too much for three of us to go. In fact the three concerned were debating this point in the hall when Mother came downstairs.

She had been unusually active during Uncle Gregory's visit, for he never seemed to realize that she needed special care, and I think pride kept her up and about. But as he himself breakfasted in bed she could do so too, taking care to be down before him.

As she came round the bend of the stairs Cressida was speaking rather shrilly. "But why shouldn't we all three go? I'm certain Patrick *meant* all three. And otherwise you two will only say I'm the youngest and——"

Mother came down the last steps, and Cressida stopped dead. She was looking so back-to-the-wall already that her face didn't change much, but I expect Thisbe's and mine did.

"Cressida," said Mother coldly. "Must you scream like a third-rate Principal Boy?"

"I wasn't screaming like anyone," glowered Cressida.

"Oh, Cressida," I said, "pipe down for now. We'll discuss it later."

"No, let's get this settled now," said Mother quite calmly. "What was this—excursion, you were planning?"

"Not an excursion, darling," I said. "A cocktail party. Do you know none of us have ever been to one?"

"I'm very glad of it," said Mother. "Who has asked you to one now?" She sat down on the stairs.

I laid the card on her skirt. "The Peerage!" I said, trying to sound unconcerned.

"Really?" Mother sounded almost pleased. "Oh, Lady Malfrey. It's very kind of her of course. Have you anything suitable to wear?"

"I think we can p-probably rake up something."

Mother smiled at Thisbe and me, and then turned to Cressida. "You're really a bit young for this sort of thing, Cressida, and three *would* be a crowd, wouldn't it? So just for this time——"

"It isn't fair!" burst out Cressida, her eyes filling with tears. "There may not ever be another chance."

Thisbe and I were terrified that she would spoil everything. We both interrupted her: "Hush, Cress!" "Darling, do be quiet——"

Mother waved her hand for silence. "I believe it's rather a fine house," she said. "Be sure to notice. Who was mentioning the Malfreys the other day?"

Again Thisbe and I spoke at once: "We'll notice everything, darling." "We'll dress up so smartly!"

But it was no good. Mother had remembered, and with the remembrance came a look of utter distaste. "Children,"

she said sharply. "It was that young man, that *journalist*, who was a cousin of the Malfreys."

"S-so it was!" I said brightly. Thisbe, with greater dignity, remained silent and looked detached. Cressida had turned away and was unobtrusively blowing her nose.

"How *very* underhand!" said Mother.

"Oh no——"

"Yes, Morgan, very. And you children seem to have no discrimination or pride. Chasing a young man like that! I am often ashamed at your appalling taste. Please write and refuse the invitation."

Silence.

"Thisbe!" said Mother. "You are the oldest. Will you please write that letter today?"

"Oh, Mother, *please* let us go!" Thisbe came forward. "We should so like to go and see all the funnies, and come home and tell you and Father about it!"

"Please don't argue with me," said Mother. She closed her eyes, and leaned sideways against the banisters. "I don't want to feel ill on Gregory's last morning."

"Don't feel ill, darling, but just say we can go to the party." Thisbe, for once, was actually wheedling, but Mother was flushed now and beginning to wring her hands and bite her lips. "Morgan!" she said.

I couldn't ignore her appeal. I sat on the step beside her, and put my hand on hers. She was shaking. "Darling, it's all right," I said, "I don't want to go." I wondered if I ought to fetch Father.

"Thisbe!"

"Oh Lord, I suppose we'll have to refuse, then." Thisbe didn't sound at all resigned, but at least she wasn't going to make trouble. Cressida, however, still facing the wall, and presumably still crying, said again: "It isn't fair! Mother, you're not fair to us!"

And at that Mother stood up, clasping her hands to her breast, and I turned to run upstairs and fetch Father.

"Mother, dear, it's all right," I repeated distractedly,

and was rushing up the first flight when I almost bowled over Uncle Gregory.

He came dot and carry down the stairs, his curly pipe resting on his chin, and said in his pinched little voice: "Grace, my dear, what is all the commotion about?"

CHAPTER XIII

MOTHER made an enormous effort. She closed her eyes for a moment and then, opening them, smiled quite naturally. "Oh, good morning, Gregory. How did you sleep?"

"Just as badly as usual." He came down into the hall and looked at her severely. "What are you upsetting yourself about?"

"I'm not upset, Gregory. Only rather sorry you're going so soon. The taxi will be here any moment."

"Nonsense, Grace. Girls been misbehaving?" He stared piercingly at me. "What have you been up to now, Morgan?"

I glanced at Mother. The flush had gone, and she was white and drawn. She met my eyes appealingly.

"I don't think I've been up to anything much," I said. "It's nothing, really. Nothing at all interesting."

Uncle Gregory turned to Thisbe, and she stood with her hands in her trousers pockets and gave him look for look. "It was only," she said coolly, "that we rather wanted to go to a cocktail party."

"Oh, was that all. Filthy things, cocktails. Never know what you're drinking. Why can't you stick to sherry like civilized beings? So they can't go, eh, Grace? Unsuitable people asked them, or what? Whose house is it?"

"Lord and Lady Malfrey," said Thisbe.

"Oh! Oh indeed. And why can't they go to Lord and Lady Malfrey's house, Grace?"

"Oh, Gregory, don't you worry your head about it." Mother smiled a forced smile. "We can easily discuss it some other time."

"But that's a very fine house. Good old family, too—he's the eighth peer, you know. Why can't they go?"

I waited for Mother to mention Patrick, but she only

said: "I'd rather not go into my reasons now, Gregory. Have you got everything, do you think?"

"Grace," said Uncle Gregory. "I don't know what Agnes would say if she could see you shutting the girls up like this. How are they ever going to find husbands for themselves?"

Mother clutched desperately at the banisters, and I went and took her other arm. She said: "I don't want—I'm never happy unless—oh, Gregory, it's so *safe* here!"

"Nonsense, Grace. Of course the girls must go to this party. Promise me, now. All three of them."

I got ready to fetch Father. I knew Mother was going to shriek in another moment, and my knees began to shake. What on earth was the old bully doing? Didn't he *know*——

But Mother said faintly: "All right then, Gregory. I promise. Just this once."

Uncle Gregory drew out a large watch and looked at it with disapproval. "Taxi ought to be here," he said. ("It's just come," said Thisbe.) "Look here, Grace, I can't wait to discuss this now, but I'll come again next month and we'll go into the matter thoroughly. Understand? Now behave yourself for the present and don't forget that promise."

"No no. I won't forget."

"Good-bye, m'dear." He kissed her cheek. "Good-bye, girls." And he gave each of us two crooked fingers, as was his facetious habit. "Better not wait to see Tom." And he fussed into the taxi and was driven away.

Then, of course, Mother's control gave way, and she began to cry. But there was no scene, she went slowly upstairs, weeping quite silently, and turned into Father's dressing-room.

CHAPTER XIV

OUR triumph was naturally rather dimmed by Mother's distress. She stayed in bed all that day, and looked so sorrowful that I began to hate the thought of the cocktail party. After I'd taken up her lunch tray I bustled angrily out to the kitchen and told Thisbe and Cressida that it was no good, we couldn't go, and I was going to tell Mother so. Cressida stared at me in consternation, and Thisbe told me sharply not to be an idiot. "We've got her promise and no bones broken. You can't back out now, it'd be the most frightful anti-climax."

"But she looks wretched, Thisbe."

"You'd better keep out of her room for the rest of the day, or we shall have you ratting. I expect she does look wretched, but she's quite calm, isn't she?"

"Yes, that's what's so extraordinary."

"Well, I'm going to the party," said Cressida defiantly, "whoever else doesn't."

Thisbe ignored her. "Did you notice, Morgan? She said, 'It's so safe here.' What does she think would happen to us if we went away?"

"I wish I knew. And why did she let Pandora get married? She wasn't pleased, but she was quite calm about that, too."

"Almost as if she didn't want her any more, wasn't it? Well, I don't know, I'm beginning to look forward quite enthusiastically to the Little Wizen's next appearance. St. Gregory for Merrie England!"

"Thisbe," I said angrily, "if you're going to compare poor Mother to a dragon——"

"Sorry, ducks, no, I didn't mean that, of course. Let's get lunch over now, for heaven's sake, and just promise me you'll leave Mother alone today. She'll be better tomorrow, I expect."

"But I must see her to say good night."

"We'll do that together. Be a good girl, now, Morgan, and leave her to Cressida and me. We can take it, can't we, Cress?"

"I suppose so," said Cressida. "I mean, I *hate* her to be unhappy, of course, but I do think we *ought* to go to that party."

"Are you sure ought is the word?"

Cressida began to explain, but Thisbe cut her short. "Morgan, be an angel and send some tins off to the starving Pandora today, will you? Take Teresa for the walk."

"Okally Dokally," I said. Father would have had a seizure if he'd heard me.

Teresa, however, didn't at all want to walk to Wools on a windy afternoon, so I went off by myself, and in the Post Office I encountered Mrs. Warren, wife to the Vicar and aunt to James.

Mrs. Warren didn't altogether approve of the Harvey girls, but since we were now connections by marriage she felt she ought to help and advise us, and she also meant to make use of us if she could. Today she renewed her appeal for one of us to teach in the Sunday School. We had repeatedly refused this honour, but today I was feeling guilty about Mother and I suppose this weakened my resistance. I hesitated, and Mrs. Warren implored. Miss Jasper, of the Post Office, was away for a week; wouldn't I take her place, just for once? Positively, she added playfully, no strings attached.

"Well," I said, thinking of James and Pandora. Would it bring me luck, I wondered, to do something unselfish for once in my life? Best, of course, to do it as Pandora had; freely, and without hope of reward. I dumped a large and slovenly parcel on the scales, and waited while Miss Jasper's fourteen-year-old stand-in looked confusedly up and down a column of figures. "Well——" I said again.

"You will, you will!" cried Mrs. Warren. She clapped her gloved hands and gave me much too kind a smile. I could almost hear her thinking how good the experience would be for me, and that I was quite a nice girl really, if one just looked for the best in me. I found myself kicking the counter like a sulky child.

"A parcel for dear little Pandora, I see." Mrs. Warren tried to tuck in a loose end of string. "Is it her birthday?"

"Oh no, not till June." I didn't mean to say any more, but those kind eyes peering into my face must have unnerved me, for I added: "This is only a few tins. I'm afraid they're not very well packed."

"Let me just tighten this knot a little," said Mrs. Warren, undoing it with ease, gloves and all. "I rather feel," she added, taking off the gloves, "that this outer wrapping" —she turned the parcel over and picked at the next knot— "might be a shade tighter, less—as it were—voluminous. Don't you think so?" She had the paper off now, and was slipping aside the inner string, ready to rearrange the tins. I knew she wanted to know what was in them, but I had luckily forestalled her by bundling each tin up separately in newspaper. She looked at them wistfully, stacked them into a cube, and pulled the inner string tight. It broke.

"It does that," I remarked, "if you pull it too tight."

"Rather elderly garden twine, dear; not really quite suitable, was it? Now I wonder if you, Gladys, could find us just a wee bit of *strong* string. You could? Clever girl! Kind *and* clever! Gladys," she went on, dexterously retying the inner parcel, "has a young sister in your class, Violet. *Never* misses, does she, Gladys?"

She had the outer paper on now, a masterpiece of neatness. As she tied the final knot she said: "Another time, dear Morgan, it would be worth while to do it up yourself. I can see dear, dreamy little Teresa's hand in this, can't I? No, no, don't tell me! Never tell tales out of school!"

Shamefully, I didn't tell her that I had packed the

parcel myself. It was low of me, and I still feel a little uncomfortable when I think about it. But she hurried on, and I told myself that I really couldn't interrupt her. "Three-thirty, then, at the School. Just tell them any Bible story you like, ask them a few questions on it, and have the Lord's Prayer and some hymns. Perhaps one of your sisters would play the harmonium? Or is that too much to ask? Cheery-bye for now!"

"Good-bye," I said weakly. I paid for the parcel (Gladys having got the better at last of the figures), stuck on the stamp and went out. Cheery-bye, forsooth! Merry-bye or even jovial-bye!

When I asked Teresa, atheist as she was, to play the harmonium for me next Sunday, she unexpectedly agreed. "You never know," I told her, "we might get hold of another James."

"I don't mind coming," said Teresa. She was looking radiant this morning, and I asked her why she was going about with a face like a new penny. "Because I haven't got to go back to the convent ever again. I've been sitting with Mother, and she's promised to write. She thinks it was bad for my nerves!"

"And mine," I said, and I was just as thankful as Teresa. I felt sure that Mother was right. The child's nerves would get stronger with age, I thought comfortably, and it was no good torturing her. Pandora couldn't say we hadn't tried.

Teresa and I argued intermittently for the rest of the week about Bible stories. She wanted Moses in the bull-rushes or Noah's Ark, either of which, she said cynically, would do, as the little half-wits were bound to have heard them before, and be able to answer questions on them. I suggested Elijah and the raven, which for honest dullness could hardly be surpassed.

Teresa then veered right round and said that what we

needed was something beautiful. Why not Ruth and Boaz? Why not Tamar, interjected Thisbe, though perhaps to do it full justice we should act it.

At this I became inspired. We *would* act, I said (no, not Tamar, Thisbe, don't be silly,) we would read it first and then act it, and then of course the little dears would remember it for life.

The Gadarene swine would be suitable, Cressida thought.

"Or the Five Thousand," said Teresa. "Greedy little beasts, we could give them sweets."

"Of course we couldn't," I said. "No one's allowed to act Christ, except the people at Oberammergau. Why not the Tower of Babel? That would be suitable."

"Not very," Thisbe pointed out, "because you couldn't get them to talk foreign languages at the end."

"Of course there's Abraham," said Teresa thoughtfully. No one denied it.

"Daniel?" I said. "Anyone can be a lion."

"Jacob," said Cressida. "Anyone can be an angel too, and I know there's a step ladder in the school."

"Too many broken bones," I said, conscious of my responsibilities.

"Are they going to dress up?"

"No, I'm afraid not, Teresa. It would take too long. Wouldn't it be fun though?"

"It's ages since we played charades," exclaimed Thisbe. "Let's do some on Mother's birthday."

"Good idea. You write a play."

"All right, I will. Now come on, you really must decide something."

"Blast Sunday."

"Don't blast it. The better the day the—ow! That was my shin!"

"It was meant to be."

"But, Morgan, think how good for the poor little things to have you to teach them instead of Miss Jasper. Honestly, you might inspire them."

I looked suspiciously at Thisbe, but she seemed quite grave.

"Nuts," I said, "they'll probably hate me."

"What about hymns?" asked Teresa.

"I should think the Child She-Bear," said Cressida.

"Or even Jesus-lives-no-longer-now," suggested Thisbe. "Anything for a little mystification."

"Something easy," said Teresa plaintively.

"Why not imitate Bernard?" said Thisbe, who had been reading *The Young Visiters*. " 'A very good hymn called I will keep my anger down, and a Decad of the Rosary.' "

"Shut up, all of you," I said. "This is serious."

But we continued to wrangle on and off, without getting any further, and ceased to be amused at our own jokes. It was a gloomy sort of week, because Mother, although she got up for longer each day, looked wistful and was recovering slowly from her upset. On Sunday, however, she seemed like her happier self, and I took Teresa off to Wools that afternoon with a feeling of relief. I really believed that this particular cloud was drifting away, and I'd be careful, I thought, not to attract another.

Walking across the field path, I told Teresa that I had made a decision. "We'll have the coat of many colours," I said, showing her a brightly checked overall that I had in a basket, with two hymn books and a Bible.

"I thought no dressing up?"

"Only for Joseph himself," I said, "the others must use their imagination."

"Don't expect they have any," grumbled Teresa, but I ignored her, for it was a mild sweet-smelling afternoon, the thorn bushes were bursting into green, and I was resolved to love the children one and all. I wasn't seriously hoping for a second James to drop from heaven, but I did tell myself that there could hardly be imagined a greater coincidence than if a young man *did* look in, and everyone knew that I believed in coincidence.

It was difficult to love the children when I actually saw

them, huddling round the hot-water pipes under a highly coloured photograph of King George VI. They kept pushing each other and squealing, and the clean ones had smug expressions, and the dirty ones had no handkerchiefs.

I tried to learn their names and Teresa was very quick at prompting me when I got stuck. She looked intensely fastidious, and ostentatiously wiped the keys of the harmonium with her handkerchief.

We sang "Loving Shepherd of Thy Sheep," Teresa and I at a canter and the children about a bar behind and flat. Teresa did very well, except when she forgot to use her feet. Then we prayed. I had expected to be embarrassed by this, but the bleating sounds that rose up to listening heaven were so grotesque that I could hardly keep from laughing. The worst bleater was Violet, the only clean child who didn't look smug, and sister to the Post Office stand-in. Her mouth hung open in a terrified manner and she couldn't pronounce her S's or her R's. I decided to be very kind to her.

At the end of the Lord's Prayer there was a pause. Teresa waited for me to plunge into the story of Joseph, and the children stared at me and chewed gum. I turned to Teresa. "*Not* Joseph," I said quietly. "*Sheep!* Only thing they can do!" And I opened my Bible.

"Now, children," I said, "I'm going to tell you a story." My eye fell on the page before me. It was Job and I glanced away in case it should distract me. I couldn't remember where to find the parable of the Good Shepherd—was it in Luke?—I dared not keep the children waiting. I plunged boldly into the story, with a lot of blue sky, sparkling streams, and warbling birds to give me time to think out my theme.

It worked out rather well. The little gum-chewers gazed into my face and no one interrupted. The only trouble was that it went much too quickly; I glanced at my watch as I came to the end and decided to spin out the questions as far as possible.

I shut the Bible briskly and addressed my class. "Now, children, did you like that story?" (They said they did.) "Can anyone stand up and tell *me* the story? You, Doris? In your own words? ('Not Doris,' muttered Teresa, 'Gladys.') What about *you*, Gladys?" I said brightly.

There was no response and I started reluctantly on the questions. "Who told this story?"

"Please, Miss, you."

"No, no, who told it first? Years and years ago?"

They got that one all right and a few more, all except Violet, who always gave the wrong answer about thirty seconds after I had approved the right one from someone else. I wished she would get something right, just for once, if only to put an end to the whispers of "Don't be so soft, Violet!"—"Listen to Vylet—i'n't she a scream?" And "Daft thing!" Poor Violet, I felt quite embarrassed for her.

"Now where did the shepherd lead his sheep?" (Ought I to have said drive?)

"On to a hill, Miss."

"Quite right, Jean. A nice grassy hill."

"Down the lane, Miff," from Violet, whom I ignored.

"Up the garden path," from a big boy. Giggles.

"And the sky was—what colour? Peter?" I glared at the big boy. "What colour is the sky on a sunny day?"

"Grey, Miss."

"Blue, Miss."

"Pleave, Miff, gween."

"Yes, blue. No, Violet, the sky isn't green. What is green?" Silence. "Who can tell me what we see every day that is green?"

Long pause, then Violet excitedly: "Pleave, Miff, gwahff!"

"*Quite* right, Violet, grass. You *are* a clever girl! Now what was the shepherd doing?"

"Smoking his pipe, Miss."

"I don't think he had a pipe, John."

"You said he blew it, Miss."

"Oh—er—yes. A different sort of pipe. One to play a tune on. I said he might have played a tune. Rather like a whistle."

Whistles.

"Show me *afterwards* how well you can whistle. Peter, yours was the loudest so you tell me, what else was the shepherd doing?"

"Looking after the lambs."

"Quite right. And what were the lambs doing?"

"Eating, Miss."

"Pleave, Miff, gwahff."

"Yes. Eating grass." I felt exhausted and dropped into a chair. Could I get these children to act a flock of sheep? It shouldn't be difficult, but they really did seem far from bright.

"And why did the shepherd have to watch the sheep so carefully?"

"Because of wolves, Miss."

"The big bad wolf!"

"Several wolves, Peter, not just one. And what do wolves eat?"

"Pleave, Miff, gwahff."

"No, Violet."

"Sheep an' lambs, Miss."

"Quite right."

They didn't do badly over the strayed lamb, though Violet thought the mother sheep was unhappy because she'd lost her gwahff and that the shepherd took gwahff to light his way as he searched. When we got to the end, I let them all go bleating round among the desks for a few moments, but I would not allow Peter to act either as the Good Shepherd or as the wolves. They were baa-ing quite harmlessly, I thought, when Mrs. Warren's head came cautiously round the door. "May I come in? They're making rather an odd noise, aren't they, Morgan?"

"They're only being sheep," I said. "It will impress the story on their memories."

"What story has Miss Harvey been telling, children?" said Mrs. Warren beaming.

All the sheep stood up, and by the mercy of heaven Peter said: "The Good Shep-herd," just before Violet said "Gwahff." I decided to forgive his facetiousness.

"Dear me! We had that *last* week!" said Mrs Warren. "Never mind, dear, you couldn't have known, could you? Well, I must just pop back now and give my brood their last prayer." She waved to us and slid backwards through the door.

We sang "Now the Day is Over," and then I produced a bag of sweets and handed them round. Violet, the little so-and-so, calmly took two; she was obviously above herself, and my patronage had merely made her bumptious. The other children took one apiece with grateful smiles, and Peter, as he took his, grinned from enormous ear to ear and said loudly: "Tyste, and see how grycious is the Lord!" which made the other children stare at his freckled face with shocked admiring giggles, while I hurried off to hide my laughter by the harmoniun.

We said good-bye and started to walk home. It was raining.

"No young men, like pennies from heaven," said Teresa regretfully.

"Alas." I agreed. "Perhaps we shall be offered a lift in a Rolls by a romantic young Duke."

"You'd only refuse it."

"Indeed I should *not*! Never again. Besides, this is the wrong sort of rain, just not wet enough to make one stop hating it and begin to enjoy it."

Teresa agreed. "I suppose if we deliberately took off our macks and hoods," she said doubtfully, "we should get wet enough."

"You can't do that on purpose," I said. "It would be all right if we'd foolishly come out without them, but as they're here we must endure them."

"It would be nice to take *everything* off," suggested

Teresa. "The rain would feel delicious on our bare skin, and no one ever comes along this lane."

"What about the Duke?"

"Well, wouldn't he be impressed to see two lily-white nymphs skipping along in the nude? He'd think we came from faery lands forlorn."

"Carrying neat bundles of clothes?"

"We could hide them in the hedge."

"So we could. Teresa, what did you think of the class?"

"Abysmally awful. What did you?"

"I rather enjoyed it, all except gwahff."

"That child!"

"I don't think we'll take on the job, do you?"

"No, I'm sure we won't. That room smells. I hated it."

"Thank you for coming, darling. You were a great help."

Teresa burst into song. "Tyste, a-and see how grycious is the Lord!" she warbled, to the chant usually associated with the Nunc Dimittis. I joined in, and then, as we trudged along, I suddenly felt light-hearted. Everything was going to be all right. In some mysterious way Uncle Gregory was going to convince Mother that it wouldn't hurt us to go about more, and even to have friends to the house. She wouldn't be upset; she would be happy and so should we all. Life was going to be wonderful.

"Bother," I said to Teresa. "I meant to say 'Tiddly-bye' to Mrs. Warren."

"You meant to say *what*, Morgan?"

"Tiddly-bye. Oh, giggly and riotous-bye!" I became inspired and began to sing:

"*Jolly contented and giggly-bye*
Rowdy demented and tiddly-bye
Oh squiffy elated and staggery-bye
Back-in-a-moment and mud-in-your-eye.

"Don't you think this is good, Teresa? Now for the last two lines.

"*Whistled and hearty and never-say-die*
Merrily squiffy——"

"You've had squiffy."
"So I have. I know!

"*Whistled and hearty and never-say-die*
Merrily blotto and hiccupping-bye."

We marched into the Room singing this masterpiece of wit, and it was favourably received by the family. The girls joined in at once, and soon Father was putting in a bass, which made Mother laugh, and at last she stood up and gave a beautiful rendering of a drunken man trying to pick up his glass and never quite grasping it. We laughed till we cried, and I was quite violently happy.

CHAPTER XV

I SOMETIMES wondered if Cressida and Mother were temperamentally incompatible, or too much alike, or both. Certainly they seemed to get on each other's nerves, and at about this time the suppressed annoyance to be felt in them both became a strain on the rest of us. Cressida did not oppose Mother openly, as Pandora had, but she went about looking hurt and resentful, and speaking wistfully of Gregory, whom the rest of us had almost ceased to regret. We'd heard nothing of him for a month, and I supposed that he was waiting for me to suggest a meeting in London, but Cressida was sure that he wanted to visit us at home again, but didn't like to without an invitation. It was all Mother's fault, she insisted, that the poor dear was kept away from us.

This view of Cressida's rather amused me, I'm afraid. I was quite confident that Gregory's interest in the Harvey family was centred in me, and that he would like best to meet me away from all my sisters. Cressida must have felt my lack of sympathy, for she became rather shrill and assertive and the growing range of dissatisfied notes in her voice clearly tried Mother almost unbearably. As a matter of fact we were all tried. Father suffered least, as instead of labouring to be tactful and soothing, like the rest of us, he would say: "Don't be shrill, Cressida." Or "My dear child, mōderāte, mōderāte!" Then Cressida's pale clear skin would flush with shame, and for about five minutes she would speak in a low thrilling voice, for of course she longed to be poised, sophisticated and a woman of the world.

Finally she had 'flu. For two days she crept about looking plain and shudderingly doing her usual housework. She must have known that she was ill, but she struggled on and at last produced a martyr's crown in the shape of

a thermometer reading 101. That was her happy day. Flushed, bright-eyed and suddenly lovely, she was put to bed in her immaculate room; hot bottles and soothing drinks were brought to her, the doctor was summoned, and Mother sat wrapped in a fur coat by her window, reading *Northanger Abbey* aloud.

The whole house hummed round Cressida, and she loved it. Doctor Gerard came to see her, listened to her chest (which has always been a worry) and said that he thought it would be all right this time. Then he talked to Mother about trivialities for a few moments, gave a satisfied nod, and went downstairs. Father met him with raised eyebrows in the hall. "Oh," said Doctor Gerard, "she seems very bright. Most competent, and not over worried."

"And Cressida?"

"Just the usual bronchitis. That young lady will always have to be careful, you know, but she's all right, quite all right." And he drove away while Father went back to the book.

Cressida was angelic. She has always been a very good and uncomplaining patient. For four days she was ill and happy, and then she got better and we all began to neglect her. We escorted her downstairs to the fireside, it's true; tucked a rug round her shoulders and a cushion under her knees, and put a glass of orange juice beside her. Then Father made an unexpected sortie from his dressing-room and took Mother and Teresa out for a walk (a thing that happens about twice a year), and I went upstairs with Thisbe to help alter a dress, which took us the whole morning.

Next day we lit the fire for Cressida, but left her to get her own rug and orange juice, and the day after that we did nothing for her at all. I did suggest taking up her breakfast, but Mother said quite sharply that we'd fussed over her enough, and Father said "Hear hear."

However, I think Mother worried more about Cressida

than she would admit, and at the end of a week, when she was still drooping palely about the house, with a sniffing nose and swollen eyes, Mother suddenly staggered us all by packing her off to stay with Pandora.

I'm afraid I felt very jealous at first, and raged to Thisbe about the unfairness of life. I had so wanted to be the first one to stay with Pandora and James; to meet the full impact of their life together, without having Cressida's account to dull my impressions and make them partly second hand. If Thisbe had gone I would have accepted it, but for Cressida—younger than me, and never so close to Pandora—to have the treat was truly bitter. None of us ever stayed away, so that the visit would be a great adventure, and I didn't think Cressida deserved it just for being an old Gummidge.

Thisbe listened to all this in her composed way, and then said that in this case life was not being unfair; the treat was going to the unhappy person, and what was wrong with that? I said that if Cressida was unhappy she had only herself to blame, and Thisbe answered that blame was beside the point. "Is she to be rewarded for being an idiot?" I burst out. "Not rewarded, comforted." Thisbe looked at my cross face and laughed. "It's no good looking pathetic, darling," she said. "You'd be happy wherever you were, that's why you're so nice."

The last five words, coming from Thisbe of all people, were such a pleasant surprise that I allowed myself to cheer up. In fact, I decided to be handsome about it, and asked Cressida which of my clothes she would like to borrow. Thisbe had already lent her a skirt, and I didn't want to be outdone. I was prompted, too, by affectionate memories of *Little Women*. Teresa may have also been thinking of that, for she bundled all her handkerchiefs out on to the floor and chose the two most elaborate for Cressida's use. Cressida thanked her politely and looked rather dubiously at the drawers I was pulling open. Seeing them with her eyes they *were* untidy, I admit, and everything was a bit

crumpled. However, she tactfully selected a jumper that I seldom wore, and that satisfied me.

At first it was rather a relief to be rid of poor Cressida, but the house seemed quiet without her and I missed her more than I had expected. Thisbe could so often be felt silently mocking (it is uncomfortable to have a sister who thinks much more than she ever says), and Teresa read and read, and I was the only noisy one. There was extra housework to do, too, and Mrs. Phillips had toothache.

I have just been trying to remember Mrs. Phillips and am surprised to find that I can't. She is small and mousey, I know, with a screw of hair and pince-nez, but what her features are like I've no idea. I used to see her every day for years and years, and I used to joke with her, with a sort of false heartiness meant to keep her in a good temper, but she never made any impression on me at all. Surely I must be a very egotistical and horrible person? Next time I go home I really will set myself out to be not only nice but noticing.

The only memorable thing about Mrs. Phillips is her voice. She speaks in a pinched way and has only one vowel sound—a short i. Years ago when Cressida and I wanted to talk secrets in the hearing of our elders we used what we called Philish, a language based on the speech of Mrs. Phillips. It went something like this:

Cressida: "Mitt yi in thi giddin in tin minites."

Morgan: "Whi? Whit's in?"

Cressida: "I hiv simmthing ti disciss. Viry impittint."

Morgan: "Ill ritt. Bi thi hilly tri." (Hilly, in this instance, meant hollow.)

Oddly enough, Mrs. Phillips herself, the unconscious originator of Philish, could not understand one word we said.

Anyway, Mrs. Phillips had toothache, and Cressida had always been our keenest cook, so Thisbe and I were kept busy and we kept poor old Teresa busy too. She complained that we taught her nothing, but left her to peel

potatoes and wash up while we went off to our piano and our poems. We said: "Very good practice for you, my chuck!" But Mother found her crying over the sink one day scouring a badly burnt saucepan (I had burnt it) and after that we had to apologize, and Teresa wasn't allowed in the kitchen. She had been making good progress with Cressida's guidance, and Mother said angrily that she would not have the child bullied and exploited by us until she hated the sight of a frying-pan. I felt a beast and apologized, and Thisbe, though she only laughed, probably felt a beast too.

We couldn't help being pleased that Cressida would miss the Malfreys' party. After all, we said, she would be having plenty of fun in London, so we needn't feel sorry for her, and our entrance would be far more fashionable and impressive if only two of us went. I wondered if Mother was glad that she couldn't entirely keep her promise to Uncle Gregory.

Cressida's first letter came; it was for Mother, and was written in rather a forced style, telling us little. The next, however, was to me, and was much more the sort of thing we really wanted.

She described in detail the little house with its bright paint and labour-saving gadgets, and seemed to have reorganized Pandora's tiny kitchen. Everything enraptured her, from the divan-bed (rather too short) on which she slept to the stainless steel sink and pink plastic draining board. She also mentioned Pandora's neighbours, and planned a friendship for Teresa with a nice schoolgirl next door.

Funnily enough the letter told me more of Pandora's surroundings than all my talks with Pandora herself. It all sounded very enviable until Thisbe remarked: "Poor old Pandora. Lost in trackless Suburbia."

Then I went into the kitchen and looked around me. Those high cupboards, only accessible by feats of climbing, how would they look painted scarlet, I wondered? Only

a year ago Father had ordered a sink, and it had been installed by the window. It was inches too low. Until then we had done all the washing up in the pantry across the passage, in a still lower sink, and there was a scullery beyond that, with a stone floor and a mangle and the lowest, longest and yellowest sink of the three. Both these rooms were now unused, but Pandora could remember the days of three servants; both sinks in use, and drying lines across the scullery. She used to sneak out there and talk to the servants, before Thisbe was old enough to play with her. Of course I had seen steel sinks in shop windows, and advertised in magazines, but it took Cressida's letter to make me dissatisfied with what I still thought of as the nice new kitchen sink.

Cressida's next letter was rather incoherent and very badly spelt. Her only reason for writing was that she wanted Gregory's address. Apparently Pandora and James were taking her to a dance, and although James was quite willing to bring one of his City friends along for her, Cressida had decided that she wanted Gregory. Would Thisbe —to whom she was writing—please persuade Morgan to copy his address on to a postcard.

In a rather pettish mood I put Gregory's card into an envelope alone and sent it off. This was to show Cressida that Gregory was hers for all I cared, every whisker of him. Afterwards I wished I hadn't been so high and mighty, as I meant to collect mementoes of all my young men and Gregory's card would have been a start. I wasn't sure that without it's help I should manage to remember Gregory at all.

"I *am* having such fun [wrote Cressida, a few days later]. The Dance was lovely and I had a new frock for it; Pandora and I chose it that very day, and thank heaven it fitted. They take *ages*, you know, to do alterations in London. I wanted a green one of course, but P. persuaded me to try grey for a change—grey chiffon—and I'm so glad I did as it really

looked nice. You see there really *is* method in what you call my madness, Morgan, in always having some money left out of Father's last present! !

"Gregory came to dinner here first. We gave him the most recherché little meal, mushroom soup (out of a *tin*!), steak and kidney pie and a new sweet I'd copied out of the *Listener*—mostly evaporated milk and gelatine and cocoa, but you'd never guess it. He was impressed!

"The Dance was great fun too, but I was rather stiff at first. We *must* practise. The schoolroom would do perfectly with its oilcloth floor. James says I'm just nervous, and will be a good dancer when I learn to relax. Let's have a regular twice-weekly dancing evening, shall we? Gregory is going to give me a book on ballroom dancing; he says he learnt from it and doesn't need it any more, and that if we read it intelligently we can learn Rumbas and Sambas and all the excitements. Won't it be fun? He said he'd come down and give us all a lesson one day—even Teresa. I simply *couldn't* say that we weren't allowed to receive him; wasn't it awful? It would be lovely if he could come, and it's sweet of him to offer."

At this stage in her reading Thisbe snorted. "Sweet of him, indeed! He offers to teach us dancing—one on, as it were, and three off for audience—and Cressida say's he's sweet!"

"Perhaps he'll bring three handsome friends," I said hopefully.

"Not he! He thinks he'll have us all quarrelling over him."

"Well, go on reading, anyway. We can't have him here."

"The schoolgirl I mentioned to you is really very nice. Of course she's not a patch on dear little T. either for looks or intelligence, but she's much more sociable, goes to a good day school and is a keen Girl Guide. They have camps and nature rambles and are always passing tests. Now I come to think of it, what an excellent thing that would be for Teresa.

She would learn to mix with other children, stop being so shy, and do all sorts of practical and useful things with her hands. Being so clever she would quickly win a lot of badges, and that would be good for her self-confidence, too. I don't see how Mother could possibly mind that. Do broach it, won't you. Gregory's sister is a Guide too."

Thisbe looked up quite seriously from the letter and called to Teresa. "Come here a minute, darling."

Teresa was mending with glue some of the dolls' house furniture. Now that we were all too big to play dolls, she had taken the house over and was patiently doing it up. She had neat fingers and original ideas, so that the shabby old house was becoming prettier every day. Yesterday, she had made tiny green window-boxes and persuaded Mother to paint little flowers for them. Today she was tenderly sticking the legs on to the dining-room chairs. She came over to us reluctantly.

"Cressida suggests that you might like to join the Girl Guides," said Thisbe.

Teresa said: "the *Girl Guides*?" as though it had been "The Klu Klux Klan."

"She suggests," said Thisbe, "that it would be fun for you to meet other people of your age, and perhaps go camping and so on."

"I haven't got to, have I?" said Teresa. "She hasn't mentioned it to Mother?"

"No, no, darling, she's just thrown out the idea."

Teresa sighed deeply, said: "The Girl Guides indeed!" and went back to her dolls' house.

We looked at each other and laughed. I never thought of trying to persuade Teresa. To me, as to her at that time, Girl Guides seemed utterly barred from serious consideration.

Cressida's next letter was, to my mind, the funniest of all. She wrote to Thisbe, and of course I wasn't meant to see the thing, but Cressida ought to have known that

Thisbe was not to be relied upon if her sense of humour was touched. She couldn't resist passing the sheets over to me.

I've been thinking such a lot about us all [wrote Cressida earnestly]. I feel that I can see the whole family much more clearly now that I'm away, and you'll see that when I come back I shan't be nearly so easily worried or upset by the little things that happen. I am going to get to work *really* seriously on the kitchen garden. I can see now that I've only been playing at it, just as Morgan has been only playing at her music, and that's no way to live. I shall look upon it as a stepping stone to something much *much* more soul-satisfying and important. Gregory says that the first step towards success is to do the thing nearest to hand really *well*. Then—with that behind you—you can afford to despise it and look for something better, but *not* until you've mastered it. I think that's so true. I'm going to make an inflexible time-table for myself, and I think it would be good for Teresa to come and help me when she's not doing her lessons—it will get her out into the fresh air. I will still promise to cook on Saturdays and Sundays, but on the other days I'm afraid you and Morgan will have to manage without me. I hope this doesn't sound too ruthless. One never gets anywhere without singleness of purpose, and has to be a bit ruthless at times, you know. I hope you will always be ruthless about your writing—so far you've been the only one of us to sacrifice other things—pleasures, and even your Family sometimes —to your Art. I do implore you to go on doing that.

As for Morgan, I don't know what to think. I know she is older than me but she does seem to treat Life rather as a joke at times, and I don't believe she's really very *integrated*. Unless she will really get down to her music and be willing to give up other things for its sake, I believe she would do better to buy a typewriter and teach herself touch-typing. I believe one can learn shorthand out of a book, too. Then, as I don't expect she'd be allowed to do a real job away

from home, she could take in people's MSS. and type them at home. If she mastered that she'd have earned a little money of her *own* and done something to be proud of, and then perhaps she could go on to something more exciting. Do please think about this *carefully* and write and let me know your views.

I'm afraid I didn't take this out-pouring at all seriously. Cressida's earnest desire to promote her brussels sprouts to an Art and the First Rung of a Ladder struck me as exquisitely funny, while I thought her constructive criticism of my way of life was unmitigated cheek. How dared she find fault with my playing, whose beauty she was quite unqualified to appreciate? "Who," I asked Thisbe, "is going to cook when I am typing madly and you and Cressida are absorbed respectively in your Arts? We can't *all* cook at the weekends and sacrifice 'even our Families' all through the week!"

"I don't think she's quite thought that one out."

"Heaven defend me from such a pompous outlook! I'm glad she thinks I treat life as a joke, and I'll be careful to do it more than ever when she comes back. The half-baked little prig! Is all this Gregory's doing, do you suppose?"

"I'm not sure. The Wide World does seem to upset our concepts a bit when we go out into it. Rat was probably wise when he advised Mole to let it alone and never refer to it again. Look at Pandora! Even she seems a bit worried about our little idiosyncrasies. But of course Cressida's method isn't the right one. There's only one possible way to improve our lot."

"And that?" I asked with misgiving.

"Rebellion."

"Oh, Thisbe, don't *you* start on that. It won't be needed in the end you know. Pandora never rebelled."

"Not exactly," said Thisbe.

"Not at all!" I said. "And she got married all right and there wasn't any trouble. Do you know why, Thisbe?"

Thisbe didn't speak for a moment. Then she said: "No, I don't know, but I think Pandora does."

"Then why on earth doesn't she tell us?"

"Well——" said Thisbe.

"Well what?"

She gave me a sidelong glance. "Go and practise, my love, and show how integrated you are!"

CHAPTER XVI

THISBE and I set off for the Malfreys in rather a twitter. Luckily, if you bother to read a few illustrated papers you can always find out what to wear when, so that we didn't make any crashing *faux pas*, such as wearing long dresses or flowers in our hair. Thisbe had a black dress with tiny sequins at the neck, and I had a red moiré, and had wanted to wear my long sophisticated ear-rings; but Thisbe had said I looked like a tart—not a very successful one, she'd added—so I'd put them back reluctantly in the drawer. But we both had very high heels and very thin nylons, and we decided impartially, as we stood together in front of Mother's tilted pier glass, that there wasn't likely to be anyone at the party to touch us.

We repeated this hope, with waning confidence, as our taxi scrunched up the avenue to the Malfreys' ugly dignified house.

There were an awful lot of cars parked in the gravelled square, and an awful lot of steps to walk up. A butler—positively—led us across the tiled hall and asked for our names. "The Misses Harvey," we said nervously. "Mrs. Harvey," he replied courteously, "and——?"—"No, no, the Miss Harveys," said Thisbe, and I said: "Miss Harvey and Miss Morgan Harvey." The butler bowed. "Mrs. Harvis," he announced, and after a pause: "Miss Morgan-Harvey!" We wondered what we ought to have told him.

We went into a big light room, banked up with flowers and humming with voices. There were masses of people there, and after we'd shaken hands with Lady Malfrey—a solid-looking woman in black—we edged our way down the room, looking round in vain for any face we knew.

"If Patrick's not here," I said, "I'll kill him. He ought to be watching for us."

"Morgan," said Thisbe tensely. She was blushing

violently, not to a wild-rose flush but a hearty beet colour. "The most frightful thing! Did you notice her frock?"

"Whose? Lady Malfrey's?"

"Yes."

"No, not particularly. Why?"

"It's—it's the same as mine! Oh let's go home!"

I could hardly believe my ears, or—when I looked—my eyes. But it was perfectly true, Lady Malfrey's solid form was firmly encased in a magnified repliqua of Thisbe's elegant little frock. "If you counted the sequins," said Thisbe mournfully, "you'd find the same number. Oh dear! And I did want her to like us!"

"Never mind, darling," I said. "I don't expect she even noticed."

"Oh, but she did. Her eyes suddenly came popping at me about an inch out of their sockets."

It was dreadful to see my admired sister, who never cared tuppence what anyone thought of her, reduced to a crimson dither by an old haddock like Lady Malfrey.

"It's *bottomlessly* frightful luck," I said.

"She's furious."

"Well, you be furious too. Goodness knows you paid enough for the thing."

We were wedged face to face by this time, and totally encircled by backs. Thisbe's cheeks began to cool; she looked rather white. "Lucky we're not alike," she said. "Nobody could guess that we're having to talk to our own sisters."

"Of course they couldn't."

"Morgan, the awful thing is—I don't believe we're as unique as we think we are. No one's looking at us at all. Do you think we're really quite ordinary?"

"Oh no, Thisbe. It's just that we're lost in the crowd. You don't really want to go home, do you? I'll come if you do."

"No, no, thank you, darling. I'll be all right as long as I don't have to go near her again. Would it be very rude to

go away without saying good-bye to her, do you think?"

"I should think it would be, rather, but never mind, we'll do it."

A second butler was making his way towards us, cleverly balancing a large salver on his up-turned hand. There were a lot of glasses on it, and he was luckily tall enough to keep them out of danger. I decided that he was a local man hired for the evening, because he didn't wear a tail-coat but only a neat blue suit. He was thin and like a chicken, with a long sinewy neck.

One of the backs half turned, and Chicken-Neck slid into the gap before it closed again. He bent deferentially before us with his salver. "Oh, thank you," I said, trying to sound nonchalant.

Thisbe and I each took a glass. Father never gave us cocktails and we rather expected to feel drunk at the first sip. The yellow drink tasted quite mild, however, and was rather refreshing. Chicken-Neck bowed and departed sideways.

"Do you," inquired Thisbe in a high conversational tone, "care for the cinema, Miss—er——"

"Postlethwaite," I supplied. "Well, yes *and* no, if you take my meaning."

Thisbe arched her delicate eyebrows, and I proceeded to elaborate. "I enjoy a *good* film," I said earnestly, "but not a *bad* film."

"We must be quite twin souls, Miss Postlethwaite, for I'm like that about books. Give me a good book, I say to my hubby, and let the world wag on."

"How very wise you are, Mrs.——"

"Plock."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Mrs. Plock, dear. PLOCK. Plock."

"Not Block?"

"Oh no, indeed. The Blocks are quite a common family —barbers, my dear. Very well to do, of course, but so, *so* arrivistes."

"The Block-Heddes, on the other hand——"

"Oh, quite a different matter, my dear. A very old family indeed, and all in the Army."

"Thisbe," I said, "Pax, just a minute. What do I do with this cherry, eat it?"

"I suppose so."

"What about the stick? It keeps going up my nose."

"Take it out."

"I haven't enough hands to keep holding it. Wish I hadn't bothered to bring gloves, I'm sure no one's noticed them."

"Dare we drop the sticks on the floor?"

"It's an awfully grand carpet, by the feel of it. I can't see any, can you?"

"There's an inch or two showing between that man's feet. The one with the red ears."

"So there is. The carpet's red too. In fact it matches them." I began to giggle.

Thisbe looked disapproving. "Morgan, you'd better not drink any more of that cocktail."

"But I've only had about two sips. This miserable stick——"

"Patrick will never find us here."

"Wish I had a pocket."

"Put it in your bag."

"I can't get it open."

One of the backs gave a loud remarkably dirty laugh and moved away. And Patrick instantly appeared in the gap.

"Hullo, you two. You *have* got yourselves in among the old trouts."

"Oh, Patrick!" I said. "We thought you weren't here."

"Hullo, Patrick," said Thisbe rather coolly.

"It seems a pity," said Patrick, "to hide yourselves like this. Come along where I can get an eyeful and so can some of the lads. It's much more cheerful in the other room." He began to elbow his way rather rudely through

the crowd, and we followed him. "Oy, Gordon!" he accosted Chicken-Neck coming abreast of the salver, "have a dead glass."

Thisbe smiled and a dimple appeared. "Thank you, Gordon." And she laid her cocktail stick on the tray.

Gordon merely bowed and we passed on, Patrick remarking, as we came into a clear space: "Didn't know you knew him. He's not a bad old stick, is he?"

"Who?"

"The old viscount."

"The old——"

"Gordon Malfrey. My noble cousin." Patrick dived into another mass of people.

Thisbe shut her eyes for a moment. "It's all right," I whispered hurriedly. "He won't remember—I don't think he even noticed. Don't tell Patrick!"

Thisbe swallowed and opened her eyes. "Thank you," she said wanly.

We followed Patrick through folding doors, across an expanse of parquet and into another big room. Here were about thirty people, all more or less young. It seemed quite empty after the crowd of what I thought of as the grown-ups.

Most of the people were grouped around a piano, where a young man was playing dance music in his braces. Patrick's cousin, leaning in the curve of the grand piano, had his jacket over her arm.

"Suzanne——" said Patrick.

She looked round without interest. "Oh hullo, Pat."

"Here are Thisbe and Morgan Harvey. Suzanne Malfrey."

Suzanne nodded without speaking, and we quickly wiped off our polite smiles.

The pianist started another tune. He sat still, erect, concentrated. From his lips hung a cigarette, his eyes were on his hands. He played the melody as a juggler tosses a ball, flicking it carelessly away, to play with a dozen other

sparkling toys, yet always, as it rebounds, catching it neatly. I was angry with the people who talked during this brilliance. Only Suzanne, with her full lips drooping and her light eyes on his face, remained silent, although I wasn't sure that she was really listening.

Patrick and Thisbe were chattering to a small group of beautifully dressed girls and I was pleased to see that she was recovering her poise. Suzanne and the pianist were surrounded by men, and in my enjoyment of the music I had joined them. Suzanne wore an odd dress of mustard yellow. It had wide cuffs of pale grey silk and a collar which rose from a point between her breasts. In her present lounging position I could see almost to her navel, and so, I supposed, could the attentive young men. I wondered if I ought to warn her.

An old-young man with curly grey hair and a frank expression began to imitate Maurice Chevalier—rather badly, I thought. The pianist became an accompanist, and I went over to join Thisbe. She and Patrick were sitting on a window-sill and I squeezed myself in beside them. The group round the piano was dissolved and Suzanne was in the act of pulling a cigarette-case out of somebody's pocket. Six lighters flared as she bent her fair head.

Patrick said: "Wonder how she does it?"

Thisbe said politely: "She's very attractive."

Unlike Thisbe, who clearly didn't admire Suzanne at all, I was becoming fascinated by her. As far as I could see her technique was simplicity itself: she spoke seldom, and from the corner of her mouth, rarely smiled and stood as close as possible. There was nothing amorous about her behaviour, rather an intense and endangered virginity.

Patrick seemed to have got over Father's rebuff, and was very nice to us, introducing a lot of people to us both, plying us with delicious food and drink, and not for a moment losing sight of us. Quite a number of Suzanne's young men drifted over and were presented to us, and in the end

Suzanne herself came across and leaned against the wall by Patrick.

"You don't hunt, do you?" she asked us.

"I'm afraid not."

"Play golf?"

"Well—no."

"Bridge?"

"No."

"What *do* you play?"

"Spillikins," I said loudly and rudely, and all the young men laughed, while after a moment even Suzanne smiled appreciatively. So it seemed that rudeness paid.

"Are you engaged at present?" she asked Thisbe.

"No."

"Nor am I, at the moment."

"Are you usually?" I inquired, prepared to be rude again. She looked at me without interest. "Well, yes," she admitted.

"So you're several times divorced, are you?"

Uncertain laughter from the young men.

"No, not actually," said Suzanne calmly.

I was about to say that in my view engagement led to marriage, when Thisbe muttered in my ear: "*Don't*, Morgan. It's that awful cocktail. Do stop!"

Patrick said: "What about you giving us a tune, Morgan?"

"What, Beethoven or something? Here? Don't be silly."

"Come on, Morgan," said a lot of people. "Let's have some uplift," and they started urging me towards the piano.

There must have been more in the cocktails than I'd realized, for in a moment I found myself, quite unafraid, breaking into the chorus of: "Hiccupping-bye."

It went down very well. There were shrieks of laughter and shouts of "Again! Sing it again!" and then I was pushed off the stool by the pianist and he was doing wonderful things to my tune while we all sang. I rejoined

Thisbe and Patrick, more drunk on success than on cocktails, and after a bit the pianist came pushing after me to suggest that we should collaborate to get the thing published.

I can remember writing down the words for him, with my own name and address, and I promised to produce a couple of verses to lead up to the chorus, which—he said—was perfect. I thought my fortune was made. He was dark and pale, I remember, and looked as though he didn't need to shave. His thick black hair waved behind his ears, and he was attractive. But then he went back to the piano and began to play *Liebestraum*, very badly, and I at once lost interest in him.

Suzanne had now decided to be friendly. She didn't say much, but she stayed beside me and we shared the attentions of about twelve young men. I became increasingly aware of her odd charm. I still thought her much too thin, and her straight hair too colourless and long, but I no longer considered her ugly. Her utter composure I envied, and her laconic remarks; even while I went on chattering myself, with, no doubt, too much animation.

A little woman in the forties, with a big nose and an ingratiating manner, came hurrying over to our group. "Hullo, Sweetie," she said to Suzanne. "What a *lovely* frock. Did you design it yourself?"

Suzanne glanced down as though she'd forgotten what she was wearing. "Actually," she admitted.

"I think it's so clever of you to be able to do that. And who's your new friend?"

Suzanne waved an elongated hand. "Morgan—Dorothy."

"How do you do, Morgan. What a nice, unusual name. Rather a nice, unusual face, too!" she added with a giggle.

Not knowing what to answer, I imitated Suzanne and said nothing. I did allow myself, however, the weakness of a smile.

"Suzanne, duckie," she went on, "I've hardly *seen* you

since you came down this time. I have so *wanted* to come over, but I'm so *preoccupied* when I'm writing, you know, and my publishers do bully me so."

"Writing?" I pricked up my ears.

"Oh, you wouldn't have *heard* of me, Morgan. They're just little things that I do for my own *pleasure*, really, but people do seem to like reading them, rather. I'm on a new one at present, Suzanne, about a little boy with freckles and big ears and huge spectacles, who goes for a walk and meets an *Elemental*."

Suzanne looked faintly surprised. "An Elementary?"

"No, no, darling, an Elemental!"

"What's that?" I said.

"Don't you know what an Elemental is? It's a Presence, a Being, a great silent, brooding, inevitable *One*!" She went on for some time, but I didn't listen very carefully for I was delighted to have found a name at last for the great steel Beings in the Water Works building. Every time I walked past and saw them move in slow, powerful dignity across the windows—one bowing stiff-necked towards the ground as another rose—I thought of them as a kind of superior race, and now I could call them by name. Elementals! I rolled it round my tongue.

When Dorothy came to an end I said that her story sounded very interesting, and she went on, deprecatingly, about it for some time. She clearly didn't believe—as Thisbe believed—that to talk about an unfinished work was to spill the gunpowder out of the gun.

Thisbe and Patrick had moved away, and while Dorothy held forth nervously to a patently bored Suzanne, I looked about me. In the end I found Patrick with Chicken-Neck (now to be known as Lord Malfrey), while Thisbe could be glimpsed in profile talking to a magnificent pair of shoulders with its back to me.

"I think it's so *sweet* of you, Suzanne, to let me tell you all this——" said Dorothy, and I slunk away, before she could bring me into it. I owed her something for her

Elementals, but I wasn't prepared to spend the rest of the evening listening to her.

The shoulders belonged to a swarthy man of startling good looks, who was deep in conversation with Thisbe. By standing right against her shoulder, with my eyes on her face, I compelled her to introduce him to me. His name was Sir Hubert something-or-other, and I remembered that he had been the attentive horseman we had seen with Suzanne.

He was so handsome that I didn't hear a word he was saying at first, but then I discovered that he was telling Thisbe all about a voyage in a troopship. He must have had a very highly-organized mind, for he produced every detail in perfect chronological order. "On Thursday, just as we were coming into Gib., I heard my name on the Tannoy." (What, I wondered, was a Tannoy?) "We sailed at ten that night, and next morning the ship's adjutant went down with 'flu. After that I was kept pretty busy."

I glanced at Thisbe. Her lips were parted and her eyes fixed upon his face. I tried listening again. "The mail came on board, and there were five letters and two cables for me." What did Thisbe find so absorbing in all this? "The M.O. did an emergency op. for appendicitis that night. He was pickled as a herring and so was the Sister, but we brought them round and they did a fine job in the end."

"Did the patient die?" said Thisbe huskily.

"Good God, no! Went ashore at Port Said, none the worse. I had his leave all fixed up for him."

Thisbe's lips closed. She had an expression of pain and I realized that she was trying to swallow a yawn. Her jaw stiffened, a spasm passed over her face, and then her former rapt expression reappeared, enhanced by the tears which now brimmed in her dark eyes.

"Aden—well, there's nothing much to say about Aden," said Sir Hubert, and proceeded to say a lot.

"And when you *got* to Malaya——?" said Thisbe desperately.

"I'm coming to that in a moment. Where was I? Ah yes, Aden."

"Hubert, you're being a bore." A cool voice cut across the heat and smells of Aden, and Sir Hubert's bland expression was instantly abolished.

"Suzanne! Where *have* you been?"

Suzanne yawned unashamedly. "Oh here and there. I couldn't be more bored. Get me a drink, angel. I've *had* this party."

Sir Hubert bustled off, looking anxious, and Thisbe and I glanced at each other. "What have you been up to?" I murmured.

"I was practising being a perfect listener."

"Darling! You certainly were! What an intolerable young man!"

"My fault, I asked for it. He said he'd flown home on leave from Malaya and I said: 'Do tell me all about it. I've never been abroad.' "

"Thisbe!"

"Well, it's supposed to be what they like."

"And yet look at Suzanne. Comes up and says he's a bore and he loves it."

"He genuinely thought he was entertaining me," said Thisbe sadly.

"Better move on. He's coming back."

We slipped into the crowd and looked back from a safe distance. Hubert was now in the grip of Dorothy, who, with a flushed face and wispy hair, was talking very fast. He seemed too polite to break away. Patrick, looking impenetrable, stood listening to Dorothy's remarks. After a moment he came across to us.

"That woman! What poor old Hubert isn't being told about her ovaries——"

"*Patrick!*"

"Don't blame me, my dear. I didn't invite all this confidence, and nor, by God, did the wretched Hubert! Look at his face!"

"Serve him right," I said. "He bored us badly enough."

Patrick cocked an eyebrow. "Does he *look* bored now?"

In fact, Hubert was crimson.

"Never," I said, "have I met such *peculiar* people."

Patrick laughed loudly. "You look like an angry kitten," he said, to my annoyance. "Poor old Dorothy, she can't help it. She thinks everyone's genuinely interested in her feminine organs."

"*Patrick!*"

"Darling, don't be so easily shocked."

"It's probably quite true, Morgan," said Thisbe. "Just as Sir Hubert thought I was genuinely interested in Aden."

"Aden!" exclaimed Patrick. "Good Lord, Thisbe, why didn't you stop him?"

"I'd asked for it."

"You could have made one of your famous remarks and shivered his timbers completely."

"No one can make famous remarks if they don't feel like it," said Thisbe mournfully. She took an olive from a passing plate and tasted it fastidiously.

"But what's the matter with you? Have another drink?"

"You mean 'Have *a* drink,' " I corrected him. "Haven't you ever been taught that? Do you see what a nice dress she's wearing Patrick?"

"I do indeed. An eatable frock."

"Well, have a good look at Lady Malfrey's."

No one could call Patrick slow. He whistled. "*No!* Is it really? What revolting luck for poor old Elsie to see it looking so much nicer on you. I can't see that you need to worry, Thisbe. What else is wrong with you?"

I didn't need the imploring glance that Thisbe gave me. "Nothing else," she said, looking anxiously about her for a glimpse of Lord Malfrey. "I'm really having a lovely time. Patrick, what *do* I do with this stick?"

Patrick took it from her and thrust it lightly into the thick and glossy hair of a girl who stood with her back

turned to him. A plate of stuffed eggs happening to come by at that moment, he took possession of it, and by the time we'd finished, the unconscious girl looked like a stickle-back—not that I've ever seen one.

Suzanne slipped through the crowd and came to lean on Patrick's shoulder. I thought he looked rather pleased.

"Of all the drab parties," she complained. "And now Hubert's gone to get me a drink and never come back. I'm so thirsty it just isn't true."

"Hubert's drinking your drink himself," explained Patrick. "As a matter of fact he needs it. He's under hypnotic influence."

"He doesn't need it as much as I do."

"I suppose you want me to get one for you?"

"Darling, I couldn't be more grateful," Her slight smile glimmered for a moment, and Patrick looked at her appraisingly. "All right, young Sue. You stay here. I must say I like that dress."

He went away and Suzanne looked after him. "He's a nice sort of cousin," she remarked, and yawned. "Have you known him long?"

"Not very."

"Of course, I remember now. Your father's so famous it just isn't true." She breathed Father's pen name. "Do ask me to tea to meet him, will you, some day?"

"Of course," said Thisbe, rather surprised. "When would you like to come?"

"Next week?" I prompted.

"I'd adore it," Suzanne made adoration sound a weary emotion. "I'll give you a tinkle."

"That you won't do, because we haven't a telephone."

"Oh!" She looked surprised.

"We haven't a refrigerator, either," said Thisbe, with animation.

"Or a car," said I.

"Or even any horses."

"Only our legs."

"And we suffer with them something crool."

Suzanne's small eyes grew round. She was thankful to see Patrick returning with her glass!

"It's having to carry all the water from the stream that makes us old before our time," I said pensively.

"That," said Thisbe, "—and having to look after—*you* know."

I nudged her. "Hush—oh hush!"

Suzanne looked sideways at Patrick, but his face gave her no help. "*Who*," she said sharply, "do you have to look after?"

"Our brother," murmured Thisbe, with downcast eyes. "He's not quite like other men."

"He's not violent," I added hurriedly. "Except, of course, when the Sukebind is out."

Even that didn't help Suzanne. She looked so polite and embarrassed, fascinated and repelled, that I began to shake. Thisbe went on quite gravely: "The chief trouble at the moment is that he's living in a barrel, and it's so awfully bad for his digestion, poor boy." But I knew that we couldn't keep it up much longer.

"Thisbe," I said in broken tones. "We ought to be going. He may be *needing* us." I was remembering, incidentally, that we had left the taxi to tick, assuring it that we should not be long.

"Look, you two," said Patrick. "Am I forgiven, do you think? May I bring Suzanne over, next time I'm down? Or has your father written me off for ever?"

I thought he had, but to my surprise, Thisbe said promptly: "I think it could be arranged, Patrick, but of course you'd have to promise——"

Patrick waved his hand impatiently. "My good girl, that's all over."

"Have you forgiven *us*?" I said.

He grinned at me. "When shall we come?"

"Next Friday, for tea." Thisbe seemed very positive. I remembered that Mother had to go to the dentist again

on Friday, but I couldn't see how that would help us to fix Father.

"Friday it is, then," said Patrick.

"Good-bye, Suzanne," said Thisbe. "Will you please thank Lord and Lady Malfrey for us? We've enjoyed ourselves so much."

Suzanne looked astonished. "Yes, if you like," she said, blankly.

Patrick saw us off. For some reason he kissed us both in a mild affectionate manner, on our cheeks.

We jolted home, tired, muzzy, and not very talkative. Cressida would be home tomorrow, and we should do our talking then. I wondered if Gregory had kissed Cressida after the dance. It was a little disappointing that my first experience of a young man's kiss had been so brotherly, and shared by Thisbe too. Plenty of time, however, I told myself sleepily, and plenty of young men. No need to worry.

CHAPTER XVII

I THINK Cressida, returning from her exhilarating dip into social life, was determined not to think much of our little paddle. She wanted to bring news of the great world into our limited existence, and it must have been a little annoying when we kept swopping story for story.

However, our stories were soon used up. One evening's adventures cannot be retailed for ever, and Cressida still had whole days in hand with which to delect us.

It was sad to see how her animation would shrivel away if Mother came into the room. The expression of pride and pleasure on her face would turn to mutinous doubt, and her voice would instantly change its note. Mother was unusually sweet and encouraging to her, but Cressida could not be natural in her company; there were moments when I angrily suspected that she didn't love Mother at all, and at other times I decided that she loved her—and wanted her approval—too much for anyone's comfort.

She had bought, for Mother's birthday, a very beautiful edition of the *Ingoldsby Legends*, for which she had searched, wrote Pandora, for days in the better London second-hand book shops. She had also carried out commissions for the rest of us; a flower vase for Thisbe, a flowered overall for Teresa, and a bed-jacket for me. All of these were for Mother's birthday, and we had had grave doubts before entrusting Cressida with our money, and had secretly written to implore Pandora to keep an eye on her.

In the end I was the only person not satisfied. I had asked for a peach-coloured bed-jacket, and after conscientiously trying in six shops she had bought a pink one. I think that whatever she had brought, I should still have been disappointed. I had been silly enough to picture a definite object—not A peach-coloured bed-jacket, but THE particular one, and I had clearly seen the lacey stitch

used in its knitting, and the way the little collar was to stand up round Mother's throat. Naturally enough, my dream didn't in fact exist, and Cressida had done her best and bought a beautiful little jacket with which she expected me to be pleased. I'm afraid I was rather horrid about it.

Thisbe sat down one morning and wrote a play for us to act on the important day. She had hurriedly thrown together the characters of Thisbe and Cressida, with their young men and a few hangers-on, and the result (which I thought very clever) would have galvanized any earnest student of Shakespeare beyond recovery.

We rehearsed it hurriedly, chiefly in the old schoolroom, and while two of us were saying our parts, a third would be winding the handle of the old Singer. Indeed, in my part of Troilus I once found that Thisbe was anxiously trying the length of my cloak while I was embracing Cressida.

There was a cast of six, for we counted on Pandora and James staying for the week-end. At one time it looked as though they were not coming, and they even posted their present for Mother, but when we hid the parcel and wrote, explaining about the play and sending them their parts to learn, they saw that they were really needed. James was rather consciously detached about the whole thing, but then his part (Diomedes) was the dullest of any, and Thisbe said he might feel a bit shy as the only man acting with five girls. I couldn't see why that should make anyone shy, as only Father and Mother would be watching, but I tried to be tolerant about it.

Mother's March birthday dawned brightly, and all the family came in with the breakfast tray, to lay presents on her eiderdown. I was reminded of her elaborate astonishment, years ago, as she unpacked some pen-wiper, pincushion or bloodstained needle-book, and I wondered if

she really liked her new presents so well. There was something not quite happy about the atmosphere this morning; she turned her cheek rather coolly to Pandora as she thanked her in a formal voice for the dear little pink morning-tea set, and she kissed Cressida with an anxious, questioning air. Cressida, who had brought the breakfast tray with a little jar of violets in one corner, and dangled her parcel by a loop of string, looked eager and then disappointed, I thought. She stayed by Mother for a moment, talking too loudly of her search for the books, then suddenly retreated to the window-sill and gazed out over the budding trees.

But there was no cloud between darling Mother and me. She loved the bed-jacket and put it on at once, hurling her old one impetuously across the room, in the rough direction of the waste-paper basket. It hung perilously across the dressing-table, entangling a bottle of eau-de-Cologne, until Cressida, returning uneasily from her visual outing, rescued it, folded it, and placed it on a chair.

Thisbe's flower vase delighted Mother too, and as for Teresa's overall she declared her intention of living in it. "It's for your painting," explained little T., with her fair, shy smile, and was hugged and made to sit on the bed.

Last of all Father, in an off-hand schoolboyish way, brought his hand out of his tweed pocket, and said: "I don't know if you'll like this at all, darling. It might amuse you or you might think it horrid. I just happened to see it."

Father never will wrap up his presents properly, nor allow us to do it for him. The rest of us fuss about with bright paper and tinsel string, but I have offered him the choicest pieces saved from Christmas, and he has always declined them. Sometimes his present appears in a paper-bag, or rolled casually in a ragged piece of newspaper. Today there was no paper at all. He brought his closed fist across and opened it on to Mother's hand. She was left holding a small piece of jade.

I tried hard to see that the thing was beautiful, but

Mother didn't need to try. She gasped, and said: "Tom! Oh, darling—my dearest—you shouldn't——"

Father looked pleased and shy. He swung from foot to foot, smiling and frowning. "Of course, if you don't like it I can change it for something else," he said. "I just thought it was odd and might appeal to you."

Mother held out her arms. There were tears in her eyes and she looked young and soft. She said nothing, but clasped Father to the new bed-jacket. "It's much too beautiful," she murmured after a moment. "It ought to be in a museum, you know it ought."

Father grinned at her and said: "You can leave it to the Wallace Collection in your will, if you like. Would you have liked something useful better?"

I couldn't hear Mother's answer, but I could see that it made Father very happy, and he was humming loudly as we went downstairs to breakfast.

We hurried through our chores and spent the latter part of the morning on a dress rehearsal. The play was to be performed in the dining-room after tea, and we prepared the room by reducing the long table to its smallest size and pushing it up near the door. Two large chairs were arranged near it for Father and Mother, and draped—according to age-old custom—with a very posh-looking fur carriage-rug that Uncle Gregory had once given us. It made a very opulent seat, although it moulted dreadfully all over one's clothes. Teresa insisted on making crowns for them to wear, and no one opposed her very seriously. By this time Cressida seemed as busy and happy as the rest of us; I think we were all—except perhaps James—in an unquestioning mood of childish pleasure. Really it was a lovely evening, and I remember it now with a little ache, because it was so gay and free from anxiety.

The rest of the oblong room was more or less cleared of furniture, and a very old red bell-rope, that we had found

smelling of dust in the attic, was carefully stretched across to show where the stage began. "Rather as if," commented James, "the audience were in a museum, and not to be touched by the public."

"Don't talk so much, James," said Thisbe unfairly, "but write 'An Orchard near Troy' on this bit of cardboard and then stick something to the back to make it stand up."

James is a very amiable young man, short and square, with large hands and feet and head. Also, I am certain, he has an enormous heart. He smacked Thisbe's bottom appreciatively, and settled down with a paint brush and a bottle of ink.

The afternoon was spent in last-minute alterations to our clothes, and tea was brought to Father and Mother in the Room at half-past four. They were ordered to bury their noses in it and not stir out of the Room until five, when they would hear inviting music, and were to come to the Globe Theatre. The Cast had already eaten, though without either tasting or chewing its food, and was now able to get dressed in its bedrooms and conceal itself behind the curtains that backed the stage, before the distinguished audience arrived. (The dining-room has french windows at the end, and there was just room for us all on the doormat, between the cold glass and the backs of the warm grey velvet curtains.) At five Thisbe put on the portable gramophone borrowed from the Phillipses. Their records were consistently unsuitable—not an overture among them—and in the end we had decided on "Trumpeter, what are you sounding now?" because it started with a fine martial flourish, and we hoped to cut it off before the singer started to do his stuff.

Teresa had her eye to the meeting of the curtains, and she gestured violently behind her when Father and Mother came in. It was a pity the rest of us couldn't see them, for she said afterwards that they made a terrific entrance,

Mother leaning on Father's arm and slowly waving a large ostrich feather fan, and Father wearing, for some reason, a monocle, as well as the rather large crown which sat on his ears. They sat down with enormous dignity, and the singer's first words ended on a hiccup.

Probably Thisbe's play, which seemed extremely witty to us, would make dull reading. She had mixed up the Troilus and Cressida story with the Pyramus and Thisbe episode, and used long mis-quotations from any of the plays that happened to suit her. Thisbe and Cressida played their name parts, Teresa was a squeaky-voiced Pyramus, and I was Troilus. Pandora was Pandarus, and made the most of it, and James's rather dull part as Diomedes was much enhanced by his beautiful voice. We enjoyed ourselves vastly, and the audience seemed enthralled. At the end they laughed, clapped, stamped and shouted for "Author!" But Thisbe soon put an end to their applause by crossing the dividing rope and sitting on Father's knee.

"I did write an epilogue," she told them, "with all that stuff about good wine needing no bush and so on. I wanted Diomed to say it, as his part was so small, but the old rat wouldn't."

James said earnestly: "I'm not a student of Shakespeare, Thisbe, as you well know, and I was right out of my depth. It was all I could do to learn those dozen or so lines. But I do think you're a clever girl—it really sounded exactly like Shakespeare."

"He's frightfully easy to imitate badly, and almost impossible to imitate well," said Thisbe. "Anyone could have done that, James, you could yourself. You'd be surprised how easy it is."

"But, my dear," said James, "it was so poetic!"

"Which bits?"

"Oh, all that stuff about the poison. 'Thoughts black, hands apt,' and so on, and Troilus's opening speech, and Cressida when she asks Troilus to stop her talking." He

struggled to get out of a breast-plate made of a saucepan lid. He looked very like Tweedledee.

Thisbe and Father looked at each other, and Father said: "You've got a remarkably good ear for Shakespeare, *I* think, James. Here, you poor chap, you are mixed up. Who on earth tied these knots? Did you like the bit about not scarring that whiter skin of hers than snow, too?"

"Very much," said James. "Thank you, sir, now I can breathe a bit." He went out, and Thisbe, Father and Mother all laughed. I couldn't think why, till Thisbe told me afterwards that all the bits James had admired were real Shakespeare.

After that we drank about three times our normal amount of sherry, and sang songs round the piano. We then had hard-boiled eggs and coffee, and told stories by the fire. Cressida sat on the floor, and now and then Mother just touched her red head; they both looked content.

When we went up to bed, much later than usual, we kept escorting each other to our bedrooms, singing the Brahms Lullaby, and laughing at our own silly jokes, until at last Father put a stop to it by saying that he had work to do tomorrow, even if we hadn't.

"It was a lovely birthday," said Mother, from her doorway. "Please do a play for me every year."

But we've never done one again.

CHAPTER XVIII

THISBE'S confident invitation to Patrick had surprised me, and I wanted to see how she would get round Father. So on Friday morning, when he came back from the station to be welcomed by her with a cup of tea, I took good care to be there. Tea was served in the kitchen and I went on practising in the Room until the last moment, playing rather badly, with one ear cocked for feet on the gravel. Cressida was across the field, digging like mad in her garden, and Teresa was in the forbidden schoolroom, papering the dolls' dining-room. And Mrs. Phillips could be heard on the stairs, registering hard work with loud sighs, so that the kitchen was clear and I had no doubts of Thisbe's intention.

I heard her call Father in, and I hurried along and began industriously to wash down the dresser shelves, a job that we'd all long postponed. Thisbe was making cakes.

Father sat in a Windsor chair and absently cleaned chocolate cake mixture from a bowl with his finger. Between licks he said: "Your mother knew I wanted to finish chapter nine this morning, but all the same I wish I'd insisted on going with her."

"Oh no, darling," said Thisbe. "I don't think so. She knows her way so well, and it isn't as if she was having one out."

"No, that's what she said. Only a stopping." Father looked at the clock. "Eleven now," he counted his fingers. "She should be back in about eight hours. You'll have a good supper ready for her, won't you?" Thisbe nodded. "And a hot bottle in her bed?"

"I'll do that, Father."

"Good girl, Morgan. As a matter of fact," said Father restlessly, "I think I'll light her fire after tea, in case she catches the early train."

"Just as you like, darling," said Thisbe. "But I don't see how she possibly could."

"Nor do I, but you never know." He sighed. "She made me promise not to go and meet her."

"As a matter of fact," said Thisbe, taking the empty bowl away and briskly substituting some freshly baked buns, "I rather want you here this afternoon."

"Do you indeed, Miss Impertinence, and what can I do for you?"

"Meet a young lady admirer of yours."

"Who's that?"

"Suzanne Malfrey."

"Old Malfrey's daughter?"

Thisbe giggled: "Old Mont and old Forsyte!"

"Oh, isn't he any older than I am?"

"I shouldn't think so, pet, and not nearly so bothered by daughters. He only has one."

"What's she like?"

Thisbe chose her words with care. "Very young, very modern. Rather typical, I should say."

"Meaning I ought to meet her?"

"Well, darling, you can't draw on *us* for your young women, you know. We're much too queer."

"*Rubbish!*" Father sounded annoyed.

"Call it individualistic if you like. Un-schooled and unregimented."

"H'm—you may be right. All right, Thisbe, I'll see her. When's she coming?"

"To tea. Leave her a bun or two, won't you? That's your third."

"Sorry. Are you sure? My third?"

"Positive." Thisbe went straight on, speaking casually and buttering a tin with great thoroughness. "Are you going to be very forgiving and let Patrick True come, too?" she asked. "He's her cousin, you know, and she'd like him to drive her over."

"Patrick True? Who's he? Oh, the reporter chap. Yes,

I suppose he can come if he likes, as long as he promises not to write any more cheap little articles for whatever his horrid little rag is. That was a disgraceful business, Thisbe, but I daresay he knows better now."

"Oh yes, he's promised," said Thisbe, and with great restraint she did not name the "horrid little rag." She whisked away what was left of the buns and kissed Father's eyebrow. "You're a good old Pa," she said kindly, "but you're not getting much writing done this morning."

Thus dismissed, Father quite meekly went off to his dressing-room and Thisbe pirouetted and said: "There, Morgan! You see?" She plucked the sink mop, held it to her breast like a bouquet, and curtseyed, flickering her eyelashes.

"I see quite well," I said, "that you'll make one of those insufferable wives who boast that they always get their own way without their husbands ever knowing it. Feeding seems to play a biggish part in your technique. Wasn't Father sweet, gobbling up buns like a bear?"

"An elephant."

"All right. Anyway, I'm glad you've worked it, you scheming female. He doesn't seem a bit rancorous with Patrick."

"No, not now. Will you be pleased to see him again?"

"Patrick? Very. Oh no, not *unduly* pleased! I did think —— But no! He cometh not, she said, I mean my Mr. Right. Don't you dote on that expression? He's all yours, darling, if you want him."

Thisbe didn't answer, and I ambled off humming to see Teresa. I put my head round the schoolroom door. "Save us, child, you look petrified."

"Oh no, Morgan. Don't tell Father, will you? I've nearly finished and I'm not *mortally* cold, truly."

"Well hurry up, juggins, and go and get warm. Your friend Thomas the Rhymer's coming to tea and you don't want to be sick a'bed."

"Patrick? Oh, is he? I'll make some scones, can I?"

"Ask Thisbe, she's cook. I expect she'll let you." And I went on to the Room, where I played Chopin for the rest of the morning.

After lunch Cressida and I did the flowers. She was a bit nervous I think at the prospect of an Honourable to tea, and she wanted the Room to look its best. "If only it was a week or two later," she said, as we went out of the garden-door together, "when all the lovely single daffs would be out, and perhaps the wallflowers."

"Never mind," I said. "There are masses of the double ones now; and there's some almond blossom—you do one of your light Japanesy corners with that."

Cressida agreed, for these delicate arrangements, showing each flower individually against its background, are just as much her strength as massed bowls are mine. I like to mix a lot of improbable colours, and to add a few more flowers when the bowl looks full. I think of this, rather priggishly perhaps, as "orchestration," and the conjunction of orange and crimson, for instance, jogs my nerves like a good discord.

But if Cressida tries to imitate my style her discords set one's teeth on edge, and if I attempt hers the result is starved-looking. And in the same way Thisbe, whose finished bowls look like long baskets almost spilling over with flowers, could not exchange them for Pandora's, that are like upreaching trees. And Teresa patiently makes little mosaics of tiny wild flowers that will all be dead next morning.

We all enjoy ourselves, and we all spend an unconscionable time a-doing it. In fact, Pandora wrote, at about this time, to say that she found her housework left her only half an hour a day for flowers, and how could she possibly cope? Poor Pandora; she said, too, that she knew every bud in her little garden and did complicated sums before she let herself pick a flower. If she took two more daffodils

for a vase now, there would only be thirteen left to cheer up the garden. It was awful, she said, after she'd been used to such armfuls at home.

Cressida and I walked across the tennis-lawn, much greener and more pleasant today than when we had played French cricket there, and went through a little gate into the orchard. The crocuses were over and the apple blossom not yet out, but the daffodils were in their hundreds and would be in their thousands in another week. Cressida helped me to pick them, long, wet and luscious, and we laid them carefully on the old see-saw and went to see if anything exciting was flowering in the little spinney.

The cess-pool drained into a small pond here among shrubs and tall poplar trees, and as children it had been a favourite hiding place of ours, formally forbidden because of the smell. Cressida picked some pussy-willow there and I some rushes. I tried to remember why I had so carefully peeled rushes as a child, and what I'd meant to do with the long white insides I collected; but it was gone, and Cressida could remember nothing about it.

We went back to the see-saw, and Cressida sat on it, and I faced her on the swing. "When you read a new novel," I said, "and it describes a garden, what garden do you see?"

"This one, of course. Don't you?"

"Yes always, though it sometimes takes a bit of doing to fit in lakes and mazes and things. And a drawing-room? Do you always see the Room?"

"Yes, of course I do. And if there's a hall mentioned—even if it's a big room with antlers and things and a huge fireplace—I somehow manage to enlarge our hall for it. I mean the room might look quite different but I'd still know the kitchen was in *that* direction and the dining-room *there*, and the stairs would still go up from the far end."

I laughed. "Yes, and unless you remember to make special arrangements all the food still has to go through the hall, with plenty of time to get cool on the way. Do you

suppose we shall always see it like this? What about Pandora? Does she see her little house now, do you suppose?"

"Perhaps she does; how queer! It would do quite well for a lot of cosy magazine stories, but not for these long chronicles about a noble family who live for generations in the same house."

"We must ask her," I said. "Cressida, we'd better go and arrange these, hadn't we?"

"I don't believe," said Cressida, standing up and gathering the pussy-willow to her bosom, "that I shall ever feel like this about any other house and garden. I do love it, Morgan."

She looked rather tragic about it, and I laughed and said: "Of course! We all do. But it's all right, stupid, no one's going to take you away from it unless you want to go."

Cressida sighed deeply. "That's true," she said.

We went up the steps from the tennis-lawn and started to walk up the central path between herbaceous beds. They were a mass of young leaves and shoots, getting ready for the summer. I said: "Do you suppose Suzanne Malfrey sees that great house, whatever book she's reading? It must be awfully difficult to contract it to the size of a cottage."

"Yes, mustn't it? Let's ask her. Here's my almond tree," she added, turning aside. "It seems a crime to pick it."

"Yes, don't take too much, I like looking down at it from my window."

"I do too." Cressida started to cut the long airy sprays and I went indoors with my daffodils and rushes. I wondered why she had to be so mournful about the house, and supposed that it was just histrionics.

At tea-time the Room looked positively beautiful, and so—we thought—did Thisbe, Cressida and I in our nicest jumpers and skirts. Teresa was in the kitchen making her

scones, and Patrick had hardly come into the Room before he left it again to go and look for her, while we talked to Suzanne.

She wore very good tweeds and lovely shoes. Her hair, to my astonishment, had been cut off. What remained looked as if it had been cut with a pudding-basin, I thought, and tended to fall into her left eye. "The urchin cut!" breathed Cressida admiringly, but I thought it looked ugly.

To entertain her we made conversation amongst ourselves and she listened, looking slightly astonished, while we interrupted and contradicted each other and shouted each other down with bursts of laughter. Now and then we would pause to give her a chance and she would drop a cliché plop into the seething conversation, which at once died down and only started to bubble again after a struggle. Our common attempt to get to know each other was thus, on the whole, unsuccessful, and we were all glad when Patrick and Teresa brought in the tea and piping scones.

Cressida ran up to fetch Father, and he came down looking exactly as he always looks, neither smarter for Suzanne's benefit nor more consciously negligent. I thanked heaven for the dear creature.

Suzanne became rather more animated when he came in, and Patrick managed not to look sheepish. Father shook hands with them and then sat down and ate about twelve scones, while conversation was fitful.

Cressida made several attempts to find a good topic for Suzanne, but met with little response. At last, in nervous distress, she tried to tell her about our discussion down in the orchard, and to ask her whether the house she always pictured, in the rôle of cottage or palace, was still her own large home.

"I'm afraid I haven't a clue," said Suzanne, plainly speaking the literal truth.

To help Cressida I now chipped in. "If you're reading a novel—I suppose you do read novels?"

"Yes."

"Well, when it describes a house—hall, drawing-room and so on—what do you see?"

"I don't see anything. Well, I see the book, I suppose!"

"Oh rubbish," I said. "You must have some sort of a picture in your mind. What happens if you shut your eyes?"

"Then I can't read."

Cressida was getting rather pink. I knew she thought Suzanne was doing it on purpose. I tried again: "What are you reading now?"

Suzanne told me. It was a thriller by a prolific writer whom Father deplored, and although he never interfered with our reading I had hidden my copy in the dust-cover from *The Gathering Storm.*

I now had to admit that I'd read it. "Do you remember," I said, "the room where he found the body? It was the drawing-room, and beside the corpse was an incredibly beautiful brunette lashed to her chair."

"And she fell for him at once," said Suzanne, getting interested.

"All his brunettes are incredibly beautiful," interjected Patrick, "and they all fall for him at once."

"Their clothes are heaven," said Suzanne.

I brushed that aside. "What was the room like? Can you remember?"

Suzanne bent her cropped head in thought. "The body was on the Aubusson carpet," she said, "near the fire. There was a french window, open, and the brunette was in a chair with scarlet cushions." She looked up, pleased. "How'm I doing?"

"Which side of the hall was the room?" I persisted.

"I don't think it said."

"In *my* version it was the first door on the right. Any idea where the stairs were?"

"Not a clue!"

Cressida sighed heavily. "Do you add *nothing* to the books you read?"

"Why should I?" said Suzanne.

Father put down his cup. "Why indeed?" he said. "You make an admirable witness, Miss Malfrey. I don't expect you generally have much trouble in guessing the murderer, do you?"

"I do with yours," said Suzanne, with a smile that transformed her face.

"No one guesses Mr. Harvey's," said Patrick. "Do you always guess other people's, sir?"

"Indeed I don't," said Father. "Not the good ones. But with some of the more amateurish ones there is a very simple rule"—he looked about him. "I could demonstrate if I had one here that I'd not read."

Patrick stood up. "If you'll excuse me a moment," he said, "I have one in the car. A review copy, sir, you won't have seen it. Some of the pages aren't even cut."

"So much the better," said Father. "I hope the dénouement is still sealed."

Patrick went to get it, and Suzanne said in her bored little voice: "I just can't wait."

When he came back with the book, we saw that the last four or five chapters were uncut, and Patrick after examining the one paragraph showing on the last page, said that it merely showed someone called Penelope to be the heroine.

"Naturally, naturally," said Father, holding out his hand for the book. He opened it at the beginning and ran his eyes in a cursory way down the page. Then he looked up. "One of those two—the one not related to Penelope —will be the murderer," he pronounced pointing, "unless, of course, he's the corpse."

In a dead silence we watched Patrick cut the pages with Teresa's paper-knife. Father lit his pipe and appeared quite unmoved.

Patrick turned over the last few pages, while we watched his face. He burst out laughing and handed the book back to Father. "You're absolutely right, sir," he said, "Norman

did it—Sidney turns out to be Penelope's half-brother. But how on earth——"

"He's psychic!" breathed Suzanne.

"Not at all," said Father, happily. "It's pure common sense. Do you know which page I read?"

All of us except Patrick said "No."

"The list of names; called in this case"—he referred to the volume—" 'The People in the Book.' That made it quicker than looking for them, but there isn't always a list, of course."

"You mean the names——?" said Thisbe.

"Of course I mean the names. Mind you," said Father, "you can't do it with an American book where all the people are called Cary and Beverley and Temperance. But in a book like this, where most people are Penelope and Jane and Tom and Charles, anyone called Norman or Sidney is bound to be suspect."

"As a matter of fact," said Patrick, "Sidney was the corpse."

"In spite of being Penelope's brother?" remonstrated Father. "Oh, I remember you said half-brother. That makes a difference. But don't," he added emphatically, "go trying this on Agatha Christie, will you? It won't get you anywhere at all."

We all said we wouldn't.

"It is a great pleasure," said Patrick, "to meet a conjurer who's willing to say how the trick's done. I've often noticed," he added, "that fiction writers give their characters names to match their personalities and don't consider in the least the parents, who presumably chose those names. Some of them are really very improbable."

Father said: "You mean that the simple son of pretentious parents will be called John, when actually they'd be much more likely to have called him Fitz-Darcy."

"Exactly, sir. And the girl—daughter of good honest parents—who takes to espionage will be called Sonia."

"And a whore," chimed in Teresa in her clear voice,

"will be called Cissie or Rosie, just as if her parents had always *meant* her to go whoring!"

Our guests looked rather startled, but Father remained quite placid. "Whoring," he corrected her, "is done by men, in pursuit of harlots, not by the women themselves. They merely 'go on the streets.' "

"Go on the streets," murmured Teresa obediently, impressing it on her memory.

Cressida was pink and fidgety. "Father," she said, "surely——" but she broke off when he turned to her politely with his eyebrows up. I was afraid she'd give Teresa a little pep talk when she got her alone.

I could see that Father was getting restless. He glanced at his watch, listened to it, looked at the clock and went over to the window. "Can't think why it hasn't rained yet," he said. "It's been threatening all day and heaven knows the dawn was red enough."

Suzanne, very anxious to be friendly, had followed him to the window. She said: "I'm afraid I didn't see the dawn. I slept late this morning. We were out last night."

Father looked benign. "I expect the moon's more in your line than the dawn."

Suzanne gazed at him. "Don't you *adore* moons?" she said. "They're my one passion!"

Father was for once at a loss. But after a moment's hesitation he said gently: "The moon is perhaps more of a passion with poets than with writers of murder stories. But we use her often enough, for our dastardly deeds."

Thisbe said under her breath: "Don't you *adore* Suzanne? She's my one passion!" And looked at Patrick who loyally looked away.

I said: "Don't be mean, Thisbe. Everyone says silly things and she wants to impress Father."

"Not as silly as that," said Thisbe. "But she's certainly impressed Father all right. He's never heard anything quite like it."

Father, indeed, had settled down beside her on the sofa

and was obviously encouraging her to talk about herself. He watched her attentively, filling his pipe, and keeping her going with a few words now and then.

Suzanne clasped her long red-tipped hands round her knees and looked down at them. She was very self-conscious, and I think that was attractive in itself. We watched them with amusement and talked to Patrick, until Teresa took him off to see her dolls' house.

Then Cressida said disapprovingly: "Father seems quite charmed."

"Nonsense!" I said. "He wants bits of her for a book."

Thisbe said: "You're both right, I should say."

We heard Suzanne say: "Mummy would be so awfully pleased if you and Mrs. Harvey would dine with us one night." She looked up at him as she spoke and Thisbe said: "*That's* what she was sent here for!"

"Thank you," said Father. "But I'm afraid my wife isn't well enough at present for any social engagements, and naturally I never go out without her."

"*Never?*" flashed Suzanne, looking up into his face from close quarters.

I think there was a just perceptible hesitation before Father answered: "I'm afraid not. Never." He then stood up, saying: "If you'll excuse me, Miss Malfrey, I've been idling here too long. Your fault, of course." He made a little bow. "Say good-bye to True, for me, and I hope he'll bring you over again some time. Excuse me now." And he hurried out of the room.

I thought how handsome and charming he was, and it only occurs to me now, as I'm writing this, that he was also very strong-minded.

Suzanne, whom I joined on the sofa, said: "Morgan, you must come to lunch next Sunday and talk to Roy."

"Roy?"

"Yes, he wants to talk about your song. Have you written any verses yet?"

"Oh, is *that* Roy? He didn't mean it, surely?"

"Oh yes he did. Do that thing, Morgan. Come at one—I'm always starving after church."

"All right. Thank you. I'll try to have something ready."

"Where's Patrick? It's so late it just isn't true."

"In the schoolroom, I think," said Cressida.

Thisbe had disappeared, but we found her with Patrick and Teresa. Patrick was making drawings of a model theatre and promising to come and help her to build one. I gathered that Thisbe was to write the plays, so someone must have told him about Mother's birthday. They were rather displeased to see us and Patrick annoyed Suzanne by trying to brush her aside. She clicked her small teeth together and said: "Pat, we must go. *Now!* You can talk to Morgan on Sunday; she's coming to lunch."

Patrick said to Thisbe: "You come too." And she said coolly: "Can't. Haven't time."

When the car had gone, Cressida said: "Really, Thisbe, you weren't very nice to poor Patrick. I thought you liked him?"

"I do quite. But I didn't want to go to lunch, and nor did Suzanne ask me." She saw Father coming downstairs, and called out: "Don't you adore Father? He's my one passion! What did you think of her, darling. Was she a revelation to you?"

Father looked round impatiently. He was putting on his mackintosh, and obviously meant to break his promise and go down to the station. "She's very young," he said, "and a little silly ——"

"A little! Oh, Father!"

"A pretty child, probably rather spoilt. But what's happened to the poor girl's hair? Did she have an accident or something?"

We shrieked with laughter. "Darling, it's the latest thing, haven't you noticed?"—"We'll all be like that soon."—"How I'd love to tell her!" we said.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," said Father sharply, opening the front door. "I will not have any feelings

hurt." And he slammed it behind him and scrunched away.

"Dear thing, it's quite true," said Thisbe. "And, anyway, he really rather liked her, red nails and all. Well, I wonder whether Mother would have been as tolerant?"

We all had our ideas about that, but there was no way of proving them.

Father waited for two trains and then brought Mother back, large-eyed from fatigue and shrunken in her big fur coat. He took her straight up to her fire-lit bedroom, and Cressida rushed to pour out the soup that was simmering in the oven. She brought it up, and then fussed rather shrilly about the room and said Mother's pillows were all wrong, and could she rearrange them? To which Mother replied icily that they were as she liked them. Cressida laughed loudly and began to regiment everything on the dressing-table, until Mother almost shrieked at her to stop. Then she left the room, in tears, and Mother pressed her lovely worn hands over her eyes and said: "Oh, Tom! Can't I have a little peace? I *am* so tired!" And Father bundled us all out of the room.

At that I took a complete scunner against my family. I fetched two of Teresa's scones, a lump of cheese and an apple, and thus supplied withdrew behind a book.

I managed to get through the evening without human contact, and I had my bath early and alone, and went thankfully to my bed.

CHAPTER XIX

MOTHER'S bad news couldn't have arrived at a more awkward moment, for I was trying over my silly song when she opened the letter.

It seemed to me that the pianist (now identified as Roy) must really be interested in "Hiccupping-Bye," so I sat down one morning and wrote two verses which didn't seem better or worse than other people's dance lyrics. I got rather stuck over the tune, which wasn't as spontaneous as the chorus, but in the end I got it done, and started to sing at the shrill top of my voice:

Verse 1 "*We had a happy time*
We downed a drink or two,
We all set out for Beachy Head
And finished at the Zoo.
We danced at John of Groats
And supped in Oxford High
And then the moment came for us to warble
Cheery-bye
—Oh Chee-ee-ee-ry—bye——

Chorus *Jolly contented and giggly-bye*
Rowdy demented and tiddly-bye
Oh squiffy elated and staggery-bye
Back-in-a-moment and mud-in-your-eye,
Whistled and hearty and never-say-die
Merrily blotto and hiccupping-bye.

Verse 2 *We'd whisky with the soup*
And vodka with the fish
We drank a little tot of rum
With every other dish.

Then wavering about
We heaved a little sigh
Mopped up one parting stoup of gin and
mumbled Cheery-bye,
—Oh Chee-ee-ee-ry-bye!

Chorus *Jolly contented ——*"

"*Morgan!*" said Mother. And when I broke off in astonishment she added very quietly: "Please, darling, I don't want to spoil your fun, but just today, *please* don't do it." And she sat down on the chair by her writing-table, and put her head in her hands.

"Mother darling! What is it?" She had a letter between her fingers and she dropped it on to the table. I picked it up, then hesitated.

"Read it, Morgan," said Mother draggingly.

So I read it, and it said that Uncle Gregory had died.

I remember being quite uncertain what to say, and even what to feel. I knew I ought to be sorry, but I only felt awed, and my first shameful thought was that now the house was all our own. It was very odd to think that I should never see him again or have to listen to him, and I didn't know how to stop myself feeling glad.

But poor darling Mother seemed quite submerged. She kept murmuring: "There's no one left now, no one," and she looked unhappy and frightened.

"Darling!" I said in horror. "How can you say that? There are all of us who—who love you and——" I was almost crying and couldn't go on.

"I didn't mean that, Morgan." Mother's wide eyes didn't seem to see me properly. "Silly child. Of course we all love each other. It isn't that."

"Shall I fetch Father?" I said, and I ran upstairs without waiting for an answer.

He was hard at it, striding up and down, and shouting

out a paragraph he couldn't get right. But he came at once, and sat on the writing-table holding Mother's hand. He didn't seem to be worrying about arranging his own feelings at all, and he didn't point out to Mother that death had come as a release to a lonely old man stiff with rheumatism, who had a cross outlook and a painful body. He just held her hand and listened to her as she murmured little broken sentences about darling Agnes and how she still missed her. I thought then that it was a second death for her sister that she mourned, and not really the loss of Uncle Gregory.

I went to find the others and tell them what had happened. Thisbe said slowly: "Well, I don't think it's our duty to feel sorry, is it?"

And Cressida said: "Oh, Thisbe, think of the poor old man dying all alone like that!"

Teresa, large-eyed, said: "I wonder if he *knew* he was dying?" And for a moment we were all silent, each putting ourselves, I think, on a deathbed, and recognizing uneasily what the future held for us.

Then Cressida said: "I don't like thinking about death. The thing is to forget it while one can."

Thisbe said: "Unless one's a poet. Then one must experience death as well as life I think."

And Cressida snapped: "Oh, don't be so *precious*, Thisbe!"

"Don't squabble," I said. But Thisbe's eyes were bright and angry and she said cuttingly: "Just because you're not a creative artist, Cressida, there's no need to be unpleasant to those who are."

Cressida said loudly: "You haven't accomplished much yet with your writing, anyway. Nor has Morgan with her everlasting piano. It's only an excuse to get me to do the cooking. I do all the work and Father and Mother encourage you both to leave it to me because they think you're being creative, but you're not! you're not! You're just lazy!"

Usually when Cressida is angry she bursts into tears and has to leave the room, but today she showed no sign of collapse, and the person who wept was Teresa. I was drawing breath to tell Cressida what I thought of her, when my eye happened to turn towards little T., and there she was with her eyes and her mouth wide open and big tears absolutely flowing down her frightened face.

"*Darling!*" I said, forgetting Cressida.

Teresa came and leant her considerable weight against me. "Oh, Morgan, it's all so awful," she sobbed. "He's dead, and we didn't love him. That's the dreadful part. And Mother's sad, and so Father will be worried, and the house feels horrid and now you're all angry, and I'm frightened to go to Mother! I don't know what to say to someone who's suf-suffered a bereavement!"

We felt ashamed of ourselves. Thisbe said: "I'm sorry, T. darling," and added rather brusquely: "Sorry, Cress."

"All right," said Cressida. "I'm sorry too."

And I said: "Come on, Teresa, you needn't be shy with Mother—she'll know just how you feel. Let's go and find her." And I led her away, snuffling and catching her breath like a very small child.

Mother was in her room, and when she saw Teresa's face she held out her arms and said: "*What* is it, my pet?" So I left them and went downstairs, feeling very near to tears myself.

Thisbe and I then searched our souls and decided that it was quite true, Cressida had been doing far more than her share of the work. We tried to make amends, but Cressida had also searched her soul, and now wanted to work harder than ever. I think she secretly hoped that we might all do it together, but Thisbe and I didn't feel inclined for that, and so when we'd failed to drive her out of the kitchen we gave way suddenly and went for a walk, leaving her to be a martyr.

We walked in silence a good deal of the way, but then decided to come clean. I sang my song right through on

the Common, where no one else could hear, and Thisbe said it wasn't bad. Then she confessed to a morbid curiosity that she couldn't push aside. What did I suppose they did with a dead person's false teeth? Would he be buried with them, or would they be given to the poor, or what?

We both shuddered over this, and although I didn't know the answer, Thisbe said she felt better now that she'd told me.

We were turning homewards, much refreshed, when the same thought came belatedly to us both. "Oh!" said Thisbe blankly. And I said: "Now he won't——" And we stopped and stared at each other.

"I wonder what he meant to do? He really might have had the decency to die next month."

"Oh, Thisbe!"

"Well, he'd waited so long already it wouldn't have hurt him. Don't you start 'De Mortuis'-ing at me, Morgan."

"Perhaps he's left us some money. Enough to make us independent of our parents."

"*Money* wouldn't make us independent."

"Nor it would."

"No, it was something he was going to say to Mother. I wonder what?"

"Nothing anyone could *say* would help."

"It helped when he was here. How very odd."

"Yes, it did seem to. I do wish I understood."

"Don't expect we shall ever understand now. Come on, we'd better go home before Cressida wears herself out in our service." And she took my arm and hurried me along.

We had a very good lunch, served by a rather tight-lipped Cressida. Mother had hers upstairs and kept Teresa with her, but Father came down and was absolutely normal, so that we gradually lost our uneasiness, and were talking as usual, by the end of the meal.

But there was a blight over the rest of the day, and I was thankful when it came to an end. I went early to bed,

and fell asleep remembering that tomorrow I was to lunch with the Malfreys.

Thisbe, having so casually turned down Patrick's invitation for herself, watched me with detached benevolence as I set off to my lunch-party. But Cressida, who hadn't been asked, was tremendously envious. She showed sisterly anxiety about my clothes and gave me a good deal of sound advice. "Try to be *ordinary*, Morgan, and to talk like Suzanne. They're sure to ask you again if they think you fit in well with their friends."

"Thank you, Cressida," I said loftily. "If they want someone ordinary I'll tell them to ask you." And with this lashing reply I mounted Mrs. Phillips's minute bicycle and rode off to the gate where, disappointingly, I had to dismount and wait for some of the Sunday traffic to pass.

I crossed the road and pedalled off, singing "Abide With Me" and not thinking of the odd figure I must cut. I felt victorious, happy and glorious, but after a few miles my legs became too long for the low bicycle, and I longed to straighten them on the downward push, instead of going round and round with bent knees. It was only when I noticed this physical discomfort that I began to wish I hadn't snubbed Cressida, and once I'd wished that I started to think she was right, and that I *had* better try to be ordinary. The trouble was that I'd no idea what, to the Malfreys, was ordinary. Perhaps politics and champagne, I felt vaguely; but not anecdotes about Royalty, for Mrs. Phillips excelled at those.

I came up the avenue at exactly one o'clock, which struck me as both ordinary and polite. So I was disconcerted to hear that the Honourable Suzanne was not back from church yet, and that Mr. True was out with his Lordship. The butler ushered me along a lot of slippery passages and out into the garden. I was trying to fit a fresh

factor—religion—into my image of Suzanne, and finding it difficult. All alone, she'd gone, too!

"My lady," said the butler, "here is Miss Harvey." And there was Lady Malfrey, large, formidable and tightly packed in black, bending double to brood over a patch of perfectly bare earth.

My knees began to quiver and I put up a hurried prayer for ordinariness. I hardly heard her greeting through the fluff of fear that surrounded me. With a great effort, and speaking too fast and too loud, I asked her to show me the garden.

Lady Malfrey must have known her garden pretty well to be so keen on its very earth, and so my opening was a lucky one. She cast up her eyes as she bemoaned the disappearance of some very special seedlings, and she gloated like any Borgia over the great blown corpses of poisoned slugs. (I've always felt that poison is cheating; and I was secretly sorry for the slugs, although their corpses, looking like obscene barrage balloons, were not very appealing.) She then, forcing me away from a beautiful spread of lawns, where daffodils and broom were in their glory, took me briskly into that stricken field—her rose garden.

Here there was absolutely nothing to admire. Hundreds of unfortunate rose bushes had been hacked off at the ankles and were madly trying to cover their unsightly stumps. They were thickly manured, and marked, like heathen graves, with metal labels. Lady Malfrey, whose sight was less good than mine, bent laboriously to read each of these aloud, missing none, and always adding a description: "He's a really *good* red," or "She's white—very large but not much scent."

I followed, half-dazed with boredom, saying: "It must be beautiful" or "It sounds lovely," and wondering when the others would arrive. The garden outside this small enclosure was romantic and mysterious: I longed to explore its paved walks, its hedges and steps and dark shrubberies. I tried not to yawn.

Having read the very last label, my hostess turned reluctantly away and led me down a broad gravelled walk between herbaceous borders. I did better here, for anyone can recognize the leaves of peonies, lupins and delphiniums. I tried to talk as we went, and was commenting brightly on the absence of weeds when Lady Malfrey gave up all pretence that she was interested in my remarks, and stopped dead, as rigid as an overfed pointer. "Look at that!" she said accusingly, and she bent double and came up brandishing a weed. Red-faced and smiling she shook the earth from its roots, and said that she must remember not to get her hands dirty so near lunch-time. "But I couldn't resist just that one," she said, taking my arm, "and it came up very sweetly."

We hadn't gone far when she stopped again. "Just look at that brute!" she cried, and bent to attack a little clump of grass blades. This time it didn't come sweetly, and she dug her fingers well into the earth before she triumphed. "Got you!" she said, and stood up, dropping the grass and brushing her hands together. "Come on now, Miss Harvey, no more of this! We'll go straight in now—that is, when I've just tweaked out this little one here."

But the little one was surrounded by its kindred, and this time Lady Malfrey squatted down like a black toad and used both hands. She got up smiling shyly and saying: "What will my guests think of me if I welcome them with dirty hands? Come on now, and we'll go and wash. Or *I* will wash while you have a drink with Bunny. Come along, this way. Have you a lovely garden of your own?"

"It's not bad," I said. "It's rather a dull shape—a sort of oblong—but Mother's been very clever with it. She's——"

Once again my impossible hostess was not listening. "Groundsel!" she hissed, and fell on her knees in the path, tugging at it and admonishing it in an angry mutter. "*Will* you come up, you beast? It's no good holding on like that. Don't you understand that you've got to die?"

It broke off, and she lurched on her knees and looked

up without really seeing me. "Would you be so kind? I left a little handfork by the aquilegias just round the next corner. Could you——"

I ran off, giggling to myself, and suddenly liking the old dear very much. There was a trowel beside the fork, and I brought it too, meaning to fall to work myself. But just as I was wondering if I dared let down my precious nylons, Suzanne appeared at the end of the path, calling: "Mummy!" and bending her long neck to step under an arch of old apple trees.

Lady Malfrey looked up in dismay. "Oh do go to them!" she cried, "and keep them happy talking till I come."

I went forward, very thankful that my stockings were not rolled at the ankles, and Suzanne and I walked back to the house together, she silent and serene, as though church had taken the sulks out of her. But I was sorry not to stay with her mother.

We found Lord Malfrey pouring out cocktails. Roy was with him and grinned gloomily at me, his mouth turning down at the corners (no amount of practice before my looking glass will teach me how he manages this). Patrick was there too, and there was also a middle-aged couple called Green. They were introduced as cousins of the Malfreys, although their accents were no more noble than their name. Patrick, anxious to be helpful, muttered "Sydney" in my ear and I couldn't think what he meant. Mrs. Green was large, healthy and good-tempered, with a smiling pink and white face and large pink-framed spectacles. She looked American. He was extremely like her, but harder and with horn-rims. They were very friendly.

We stood and talked, and Suzanne yawned and I prudently refused a second cocktail. At last Lord Malfrey said gently that he thought we'd *fetch* his wife, and we all trooped out under the apple-arches.

Lady Malfrey hadn't moved very far, but appeared to

be digging herself in. The path was littered with weeds and she was hard at it, both knees on the wet gravel, and muddy up to the elbows. When she heard us coming she wiped some of the mud off on to her face and caught back a wisp of hair. Suzanne said: "Mummy!!", and Lord Malfrey said: "Seraph dear, what about lunch?"

"Oh, Bunny, I'm so sorry! I'll come this minute and we'll go straight in. I don't want a drink."

She straightened up with difficulty, revealing great mud-filled holes in both her stockings. Lord Malfrey peered at her kindly and said: "Don't you think you'd better wash first?"

"Seraph," said Mrs. Green, "you need scraping, that's what you need!"

"Oh, Jessie, I am awful! Don't worry, though, I won't be a minute." And she set off with elephantine bounds towards the house.

"Don't run, Seraph. It's slippery!" warned her husband, and she slowed down waving her hand and calling: "Thank you, Bunny."

As we walked back I decided that they were a pair of old poppets, of whom Thisbe need never be frightened again.

Luncheon was a pleasant meal and not grand at all, except for the austere presence of the butler. The soup was tinned, the mutton underdone, and the pie (bottled gooseberries) not as good as one of Cressida's. We drank water. The Greens were facetious and the Malfreys benign, and Lady Malfrey was so like the White Queen that I almost looked in her hair for a brush. Lord Malfrey's neck looked thinner than ever over a soft collar, but I found him very easy to talk to, and was rather sorry when, after drinking some bad coffee, the party broke in two and I was led off to the music-room by Suzanne, with the young men in attendance.

Afterwards, telling Cressida about the party, I broke off at this point and began to wander about the room.

"Go on, Morgan, what happened next?"

"Oh, it was awful," I said. "I hated it. Suzanne is *the* most ill-mannered beast, and—well, I came home quite soon."

"Why, Morgan? Weren't they nice to you? Did you sing the song?"

"Not at first. Suzanne and Roy sat on the sofa, and Patrick walked about as if he was longing to go somewhere else. He looked at the clock all the time. Suzanne kept asking me how often I went to London, and if I did the Season and that sort of thing. When I told her I'd never been there she said: 'I suppose country life accounts for your schoolgirl complexion.' I could have *killed* her, Cress!"

"But she sounds rather kind."

"Yes she was. That was the awful part. Then Patrick pushed off and wouldn't say where he was going. Very rude of him, I thought." I fiddled with an ashtray, trying to make it spin, and it broke on the floor. "*Now* look what I've done! Then I sang the song. They made me do it twice through, but they weren't really listening. They were—Roy was stroking Suzanne's arm all the time. They just said: 'Clever, Morgan, do it again,' so as to keep me busy."

"Perhaps they're secretly engaged!"

"No, it wasn't like that, somehow. They—they weren't interested in me or the song at all. After I'd been through it twice they said: 'Play something else,' and Roy started to trace her eyebrows with his finger. She was lying on the sofa."

"How queer! You must have felt awkward. Did you play something?"

"I played 'Pop Goes the Weazel' very loudly, and then I—then I came home."

"Oh, Morgan! What did you say?"

"I said: 'I suppose town life accounts for your God-awful manners.' "

"Oh, Morgan!" wailed Cressida. "How *could* you? Now we shall never be asked there again!"

"I wouldn't go if we were."

"It was very odd of them, of course, but surely you could have pretended not to notice?"

"*Why* should I have meekly stayed there to be insulted?"

"Surely, darling, it would have been more dignified to have made some excuse for leaving early, and said goodbye. Then you know we could have asked Suzanne here again a bit later, and——"

"We won't *ever* ask Suzanne here again!"

"I suppose we can't now." Cressida's lower lip stuck out. "And I did want to go there! Now you've spoilt it all! If only they'd asked *me*; *I'd* have behaved nicely."

"I suppose you'd have licked their bottoms."

"*Morgan!!*"

"Oh, Cressida, you're such a filthy little snob. Can't you see that she's a bad type, that girl? She set out to humiliate me——"

"Don't exaggerate——"

"I'm not exaggerating. Just because she's an Honourable——"

"It's not true. I'm *not* a snob!"

"You are! You have a mean little mind."

"I haven't. I'm well-bred, that's all, and don't like being rude."

"Well-bred? You? Ha, ha, that's very funny!" I had taken up nursery weapons now, and when Thisbe came in from a walk, very bright-eyed and pretty, I thought of a fresh insult to hurl at Cressida. I spoke to Thisbe in Philish, the language which Cressida and I had invented long ago, and which of course she understood perfectly. With a great air of secrecy, and of exclusion, I said: "Kim ipp ti mi rimm, Thisbe. I winnt ti tick ti yi, in *privitt*."

Thisbe looked sardonically from one angry face to the other. "I should think that's a tolerably good idea," she

said, not quite joining in my vindictive game but coming with me, and leaving Cressida where she stood.

We went upstairs together. I was shaking with anger and trying hard not to cry. I never even considered what Cressida must be feeling.

On the window-sill in my room, looking into the branches of the dear cedar tree, looking down the garden at the tall chimney beneath which my "elementals" lived, I told Thisbe the whole story. I may have been rather shrill and aggressive in my eagerness for self-justification, but thank goodness she didn't mock me. She listened in her cool way and said she would have done exactly the same, plus smacks and hair-pulling. Then she asked carelessly if I'd talked much to Patrick.

"Not very much. He went out so soon."

"Did he?" Thisbe yawned, and stretched elaborately.

"Are you sorry you didn't come? When are we going to see him again, do you suppose?"

"No, not a bit. Some time, I expect. What's Cressida grizzling about?"

"Oh, she wanted to meet the great and grand, I think. She was frightfully jealous when they didn't ask her to lunch, and now she thinks she'll never have a chance. Little snob."

"Cressida exhausts me," said Thisbe. "She's always in a state about something."

"Ought I to go to her? I shall only be rude again if I do."

"Oh, let's leave her to stew. She'll be all right by tea-time."

But at tea-time she didn't appear and Father said he thought she'd gone for a walk, and a good thing too. Apparently she had banged into Mother's room, just as Mother had got to sleep; an unheard-of thing to do. She had stormed at Mother and demanded to be allowed to

go back to Pandora at once, and Mother had told her to shut up and pull herself together, and had flatly forbidden her to go and inflict her sulks on Pandora's newly-married household. Father had come in then and given Cressida an almighty rocket and she had gone into her room without another word.

Thisbe and I looked guiltily at one another. "I'd better take her a cup of tea," I said.

I knocked three times but there was no answer and the door was locked. I whispered through the keyhole, as loudly as I dared so near to Mother's room, but she still didn't answer, and in the end I came downstairs, annoyed but uneasy. Sulking, I told Thisbe.

Cressida didn't appear again that day, and I went to bed resolved to be frightfully nice to her next morning.

CHAPTER XX

IT was Cressida's turn to get breakfast on Monday, but when I awoke, and thought of her behaviour last night, I decided that she might be on strike. I lay for a time, arguing the matter backwards and forwards, but knowing all the time that I should have to get up, which in the end I did.

I knocked at Cressida's door, but there was no answer and it was still locked, so I went on down and got Mother's tray ready.

When I brought it up I found Father still in bed. "Poor darling," whispered Mother. "He stayed awake for hours last night comforting me, and now he's tired."

I tiptoed across to have a look at him, and he opened one blue eye. His pyjama-jacket was blue, too, and his hair on end.

"Will *you* have breakfast in bed for once?" I said, kissing him.

"No no, thank you, darling. I'll be down in a few minutes."

"Morgan," said Mother. "Have you seen Cressida this morning?"

"Not yet, darling. There's hardly been time." I didn't want to worry her; she looked so tired and as though it wouldn't take much to extinguish her completely.

"Call through her door as you go down, and ask her to come and see me," said Mother. "I think I was selfish yesterday, thinking more of poor Gregory than of my own daughter. But I'm better today; I've really faced his death and now I can get on with living."

"I'll tell her," I said doubtfully, "but I'm not sure she'll answer."

"Not answer——?" Mother looked anxious and would

have turned back her covers if Father had not jumped out of bed and stopped her.

"You stay there, Grace, and eat up your breakfast like a good girl. I'll deal with young Cressida myself if hunger doesn't bring her down soon, but I'm going to have my breakfast first and don't you dare to stir till I come up again. Off with you, Morgan. Have we any eggs today?"

"Yes, darling. You can have two."

I paused at Cressida's door but could get no answer, so I went on down. Thisbe and Teresa joined me just as the coffee was ready, and Thisbe finished laying the table while Teresa made toast. She was the only person who could be trusted to watch the toast and not try to do something else at the same time, and so burn it.

Father must have shaved in a hurry, for he joined us soon, with a scrap of cotton wool sticking to his chin. We all hurried over our breakfast, though no one admitted to feeling anxious. Then Father went upstairs, turning back, as we trooped after him, to tell us rather sharply to get on with our own affairs.

That meant washing-up for Teresa and me, but Thisbe had to do bedrooms and so was able to go upstairs and listen, just out of sight, while Father knocked, shouted, threatened, reasoned and cajoled at the unresponsive white-painted door.

She came down looking awed. "Father wants us to see if any other key will fit. Her key isn't in the door but we can't see much through the hole. He thinks perhaps Cressida's feeling ill."

We ran to pull the keys out of every door, and took them all up to Father. He tried them, one after another, without success. He was looking terribly worried by this time, and Mother, in the pink dressing-gown that made her look so young, had come to sit on the two steps outside her own door, and watch. Oh, how the thought of that pink quilted dressing-gown brings it all back in its frightfulness! Her hair hung loose on her shoulders.

"Cressida," called Father, "you're being very tiresome and thoughtless and making your Mother anxious." To us he said: "I shall have to force the lock. Morgan, run down to my tool box, and bring me the big screwdriver with the black handle."

As I tore downstairs, I heard Mother's voice: "Are you all right, Cressida darling? Are you feeling ill?"

The postman came whistling up to the front door as I ran past, but I was really frightened now and I didn't stay to see what came through the hole. I remember feeling disappointed that Father didn't break down the door, a feat his policemen had been known to perform, though the methods of his hero were usually more subtle.

I gave Father the screwdriver, and he took it without thanking me, and said: "When I do get the door open I don't want you all streaming into the room. I shall go in first, *alone*. Do you hear?" His eye fell on the terrified Teresa, who was holding on to my arm with both her hands. "Teresa, you go and wait downstairs."

"Oh, Father, I can't! Not alone!"

"Take her down and stay with her, Morgan."

"Oh, Father——"

"At once!" said Father, and got to work.

I'm afraid Teresa and I only went as far as the turn of the stairs, where we sat on the window-sill and listened. Cressida's door was out of sight, but we could see Thisbe as she stood watching, and Mrs. Phillips in the hall below, mopping the boards and looking up avidly to see what the excitement might be.

After a moment she started to come upstairs, with a letter in her hand. "A letter for your Mother, Miss Morgan," she said in her pinched voice. Her little eyes, much magnified by pince-nez, glittered with excitement, and she was heading up the next flight.

"I'll take it," I said hurriedly. "Thank you, Mrs. Phillips. Would you mind doing the kitchen first today? I want to start cooking directly you've finished."

I've never seen anyone look so disappointed, but she did go down, although slowly.

My teeth were chattering as I imagined what we should find in Cressida's room, and Teresa was weeping. I looked down at the letter in my hand. There was something hard in it. I started to read Mother's address, and it was a moment before I realized that the writing was Cressida's.

I jumped off the sill and ran upstairs shouting incoherently. "Father, stop—Mother, the letter—the key's inside —Look, look, a letter from Cressida!"

Father turned round and sat slowly down on the steps, leaning his head back against the door. It was extraordinary how that door became, on the instant, an ordinary door again, leading to an ordinary innocent room. Mother took the letter and Thisbe, Teresa and I crowded round as she clumsily tore open the envelope and took out the key and a sheet of Cressida's blue writing-paper.

I didn't read the letter until much later, but I will put it in now. I still have it, rather torn and very creased, among my papers.

> Mother [wrote Cressida], I'm sorry but I can't stand it any longer. Here is the key of my room. I have always known that you didn't love me as much as the others, and that the girls found me dull and conventional. I don't think it's my fault, but I don't fit in at home, and I am tired of trying. I'm 18, too, and its time I had a bit of independence. I *cannot* stay and have you dictating what friends I'm to see—which means none, ever. I won't go to Pandora as she'd refuse to keep me I expect, and anyway as you say she doesn't want my sulks. I'm *not* sulky. Mother, it's terribly unfair to say that, but you've all been unfair to me for so long now that I can't bear it. I can't. I'm going to get a job (don't worry, I know all about rich men who offer one film jobs in South America). I know where to stay till I'm fixed up—outside London—and I'll write to you later. I've got enough money. Here is the key of my room. Don't be too angry, Mother. I

just couldn't bear it any longer. Perhaps when I've gone you'll notice some of the things I did every day in the house that no one ever *did* notice. Here is the key of my room; I shall leave it locked and then you'll all think I've gone early to sleep. I do love you all very much.

CRESSIDA

There followed a shakily written P.S.

In the train. No good looking for the address I'm going to. You won't find it anywhere in the house.

Mother's colour became very odd as she read this. Her cheeks grew blotchy and mauve and her nose stood out white as though the skin were tightly stretched over it. Before she'd finished reading Father jumped up. "Teresa!" he said sharply, "go straight upstairs to your room and stay there till I call you! Cressida's all right. Go on, child, hurry!" And as Teresa turned desolately away, sobbing, he put his arm round Mother's shoulders and said: "Morgan, Thisbe, you go too." He panted as if he'd been running.

But he was too late. Mother dropped the letter to the floor, stood up, and shrieked. Oh, if only I could forget it! It was a long high shriek, that went higher, and as she shrieked she beat with her hands on the door behind her —her own bedroom door. Her eyes were turned up and there was froth on her lips.

I saw Teresa, on the stairs, put her hands over her ears and break into a stumbling run, and I remember Thisbe's white, incredulous face and then Father had hold of Mother and was shaking her. She struck at his head and went on screaming.

Father was saying something over and over again but I couldn't hear it. It was Thisbe who understood and said: "The Doctor! Doctor Gerard! Yes, Father!" She bolted down the stairs and I started to go with her, and then realized I was being cowardly and turned back to help Father.

He had got the door open by now and was trying to get Mother through. It was astounding to see how strongly she resisted him. I hovered uselessly, wondering whether I should catch her legs and scoop them from under her. I felt vaguely that it would be disrespectful. While I was still dithering Father managed to pick her up bodily and carry her to her bed on which he heavily dumped her.

She was up in a moment and across the room. With one sweep of her arm she cleared the mantelpiece of all Aunt Agnes's treasured little china figures and they broke into tiny pieces on the tiled hearth. Then she started towards the windows crying: "Out of my way, Tom. Tom! I'll throw myself out! I will!" But he caught her and brought her back.

Father's face was a mask now, showing neither pity nor disgust. He slapped Mother's cheek smartly, but she caught his hand and tried to bite it.

Her breath laboured and came in high shrill sobs. She struggled violently but he held her down, and at last she rolled over on to her face and began to weep, loudly and bitterly.

"Go and get some water, Morgan. And find out if Thisbe's got on to the Doctor," said Father quitely.

I stumbled out of the room and down the passage to the bathroom. While I was there I took the chance to be sick. Then, with a jug of water and a tumbler, I crept back and met Thisbe at the top of the stairs. "He's coming now," she said.

I took the water to Father, who was sitting on the side of Mother's bed with his hands on her shoulders, ready to brace himself if she struggled. He gestured with his hand and I put the water on the table. "Stay within call," he whispered, and I stole out.

Thisbe and I sat on the attic stairs, opposite Mother's door, until we heard wheels on the gravel. Then she ran down and brought Doctor Gerard up, his kind red face unsmiling for once as he glanced at me over his horn-

rimmed spectacles. They disappeared into Mother's room and I went back into the lavatory and was sick again. I remember kneeling there with cold sweat on my forehead, thinking that I ought to go to Teresa. And then the world turned yellow, there was a ringing in my ears, the yellow darkened to black and I tried to call for help, and couldn't. I was wildly frightened.

Then hazily I remember Mrs. Phillips's voice and her peering face close to my own, and then I was in bed—the spare-room bed—tucked up but very cold and with teeth chattering on the glass that Doctor Gerard held for me. "That's a good little Morgan," he said smiling, but his face looked unhappy as he spoke.

"Do be careful, Doctor G.," I said. "I might be sick all over you. Did I faint?"

"All done now, my dear child. Yes, you did. No, you won't be sick any more. Feel better now? I just want to see if your Mother's gone to sleep yet." I didn't say anything, but he added: "She's all right now. Good gracious, what big eyes! Now you're not to worry or think about—anything—any more. I've given her something to make her sleep."

"Teresa," I said. "I ought to go to Teresa."

"Thisbe's with her. Couldn't carry a great long thing like you up all these stairs so we popped you in here instead. Would you like Teresa to come down? The bed's plenty big enough."

"Yes, please," I said.

He went to the door. "Ah, thank you, Mrs. Phillips. No no, don't come in. I suggest you go and make some tea. Mr. Harvey and I could do with a cup in a few minutes." He came back and gave me a hot-water bottle. "That's to stop the shivers. I'll send Teresa down to you." And he hurried away, leaving me to cry a little, quietly, and hug the bottle, very glad of it but vaguely irritated because it was Thisbe's and not my own.

Teresa came in a few moments. She was very subdued

and glad to cuddle close to me, and after a time, with her and the hot bottle, warmth and comfort began to pour into me. I fell asleep, and woke to find Father standing beside me. He smiled at us with pale lips and said: "Good little children, stay together like that. I just thought you'd like to know that Mother's deeply and peacefully asleep now. You've been very good, Morgan, and a great help." He paused as if he wanted to say more, then kissed us both hastily and turned away. "I'll send Thisbe up soon, with tea," he said, and I heard him speak to Doctor Gerard on the landing.

When Thisbe brought the tea she told us that Doctor G. was going to get hold of two specialists as soon as he could. Meanwhile, Mother was to stay in bed and sleep, and a nurse would be coming this afternoon.

"What sort of specialist?" asked Teresa, but neither of us answered her.

CHAPTER XXI

CRESSIDA, the immediate cause of the crisis, had been pushed out of our minds by other things, but after lunch (to which I came down on shaking legs, feeling as though I'd been ill for weeks) Father called Thisbe and me into his dressing-room.

The nurse had arrived, a clean pink-fingered woman in a blue uniform who now sat doing crochet by Mother's window. Doctor Gerard was to call in again after tea, and for the present Mother slept.

Father said: "What are we going to do about Cressida?"

"I don't think you can do anything," said Thisbe. "You don't want to bring in the police."

"Good Lord no! But I could talk to the station-master myself."

"He'd only tell you that she caught the London train at four. She probably went straight on last night to wherever she was going."

"Do you think Pandora would know anything?"

"No, darling. She'd know Pandora wouldn't keep it from you. Why not leave her to get on with it? She'll write when she's got a job. She said so."

"She's too young to be so completely on her own," said Father uneasily, and he added: "Besides, I think Mother needs all her family near her just now. I would appeal to Cressida to come back if only I knew where to write to."

"Father," I said. "Have you read her letter through again?"

He hadn't. None of us had.

"There's just something——" I said. "May I see it?"

Father searched dubiously in his pocket, and was surprised to find the letter, which he handed over to me. I read it through carefully.

"Nothing there, is there?" said Father.

"Only the P.S. Why did she write it?"

"To save us having a fruitless hunt all over the house," said Father slowly.

"But why? She was in an awful state. She wrote the bit about the key three times over without noticing. When she added the P.S. she still didn't notice. So why was she so considerate?"

"You're right, Morgan!" Father was reading the poor badly-written letter over my shoulder. "You mean that when she was in the train she remembered that she *had* left the address here!"

"And," finished Thisbe, "she was trying to put us off looking for it."

We started for the door together, and rushed across the landing to Cressida's room. I began at the writing-table and Thisbe the book-case. Almost the first thing I found was the *Spectator*, and one of the hotels, advertised at the end, was marked with a cross. It was an address in Surrey and one of its merits was "own fruit and vegetables." I wondered if Cressida had been attracted by the homely thought of a kitchen garden.

We took it back to Father, and he said: "Well done, Morgan, indeed."

Thisbe said: "A good detective's daughter."

"I must write to her," said Father. "It won't be very easy. I'll do it now."

"Father, your poor book!" said Thisbe.

"Oh, what does *that* matter!"

We left him then. He looked years older and so tired as he sat down and opened his writing-pad.

I never saw that letter, but I can guess pretty well what it was like. Father was very angry with Cressida for tearing the delicate fabric across, that had lasted for so long, and he didn't scruple to make her feel a worm. Her going, he told her, had knocked Mother right off her balance and

he dreaded to think what the specialists would say when they saw her. He feared an institution of some sort. Would Cressida please come home at once to undo a little of the harm she had done? The letter went off by the afternoon post.

Its impact on Cressida was terrific. She had felt ill and miserable, vaguely guilty and quite at a loss, ever since she ran away. She had a bad cold and the beginnings of a cough and the hotel was draughty. She couldn't be bothered to start looking for a job, although she knew her money wouldn't last long. The other guests looked death at her when she sneezed, the food all tasted of blotting-paper, her eyes were too sore for long reading, and her legs ached.

On her second morning there she felt better and went for a walk. Here in the south the spring had come, and as she walked she tried to feed on the loveliness of the young beech leaves, casting their first slight shadows on the gravelled road, and of the bird song all about her. She felt frightfully sad, she told me afterwards, but rather heroic and exalted too. On her way back she forded a small stream, and arrived at the hotel wet almost to her knees. On the board was a letter for Miss Cressida Harvey.

She had given her name, following established tradition, as Camilla Herries, a romantic name that had stayed up her lonely courage. But there was no one in the hall, and so with grave foreboding she took the letter up to her room.

She read it through twice and then tore downstairs to the little office. She had had bad news and must leave at once, she said. When was the next train to London?

They told her of a motor coach leaving in fifteen minutes. She paid her bill, packed in a sort of frenzy, and was in the coach, wet feet and all, within a few seconds of its stopping. The drive was cold. Cressida's teeth chattered, her eyes burned and she realized that she was going to be ill. But by this time, her misery was so intense that she felt glad of it, and when she arrived at the London station an

hour too soon for her train, instead of drinking hot tea in the buffet she elected to wait on the platform, coughing and shuddering and crying all at once. She had wanted, she told me later, to die.

I protested when she said that: "Oh, Cressida, you don't really mean it. You *couldn't* want to die however awful things looked." I was—and am—quite unable to imagine such a wish.

"But I did, Morgan. It seemed the only thing to do. No one wanted me, I was a failure, and I'd sent Mother to—— Well, I'd wrecked all our lives, I thought."

"But the future. There's always the future."

"That was the worst of all. I wasn't fit to marry—probably none of us were, I thought then. It was all—oh, I can't tell you how awful and horrible it all was! When that train came in I fell into a first-class carriage all by myself—no one looked at my ticket—and I leant in the corner and prayed for death."

There was no one to meet her at the station, but the porter knew her and got her into a taxi in the teeth of some strangers who had formed a queue before she appeared. She arrived at the house about four o'clock, and she could hardly walk from the taxi into the hall.

Father, from Mother's window, saw her arrive, but without seeing her face. "Now, my darling," he said, "you'll soon be well! Here's Cressida back, and Pandora's coming to see you tomorrow, so we shall be all together again."

Mother gazed at him from her pillows in silence. She had not spoken since she awoke from her drugged sleep.

"Here, Mother," I said, bringing her a cup of tea. I had been pouring out for her and Father when the taxi drove up, and now I was dying to go down and hear of all Cressida's doings.

Mother took the cup, still in silence. Her terrible uncomplaining dignity had already done much to cover over our memories of Monday morning and we were all very willing to think of them as nightmares. But I wished she would

say something to poor Father, who was unfailingly loving, gentle and cheerful, and stayed by her all day. Doctor Gerard assured us that she could speak if she would, and he seemed much perplexed by her silence.

I ran downstairs, and there was Cressida, most dramatically draped across the carpet, with her bright hair under the hall table. Thisbe and Teresa were in the kitchen and hadn't heard the taxi.

Mercifully there appeared at the same moment the estimable Nurse Jeffreys, and although in the weeks that she was to stay with us some of her mannerisms became almost unbearable, I must *not* forget how prompt, kind and efficient she now proved herself. Under her care Cressida, whose collapse had been as much due to a feeling of utter defeat as to her illness, soon recovered enough to walk upstairs, between Nurse Jeffreys and the banisters, and be helped into bed. Her temperature was taken, hot bottles were brought and Doctor Gerard was telephoned before Nurse let us bother Father at all. "The Daddy," she said, "has enough worries of his own."

At last, having calmly finished her tea, she went into Mother's room and asked if she might have the Mummy to herself for a few moments. Father came out on to the landing, and I took him straight into Cressida's room.

Poor Father, he couldn't possibly be angry when he saw her and heard her painful cough. He kissed her, asked no questions, and left her to rest, and it was not long before Doctor Gerard arrived. I had been sitting with Cressida and I was really frightened about her, but the sight of dear little Doctor G. cheered me in a moment. He had seen us through all our whoopings, our measles and our mumps with the same unfailing affection that he showed as he bent over Cressida now. I could tell that he didn't like what his stethoscope passed on to him, but he patted Cressida's hand and said: "Home's the best place when you're ill, isn't it?" instead of scolding her for travelling in such a condition.

Outside the room he said to me: "A year or two ago it would have meant hospital and a special, but now, with penicillin, and Nurse Jeffreys right on the spot, we'll soon bring her round. Better not tell your Mother she's ill yet, I think. This is a properly built house, thank goodness, and you don't hear everything from room to room. I'd like to have a word with your Father and with Nurse, if you will sit in your Mother's room for a few minutes." I must have looked frightened, for he added: "I'll send Thisbe up to keep you company, shall I? I wouldn't ask it of you, my dear, if I weren't sure that she'll stay quiet."

So then I went in, and sat looking out over the fields to avoid the stare of those deep, accusing eyes.

When Thisbe came in she said: "Is there anything I can do for you, Mother?" But there was no answer, only a long dark stare, and at last Mother's lids came slowly down and I thought she slept.

CHAPTER XXII

PANDORA arrived next day in time for lunch, and very good it was to see her. We all, at various times, got her to ourselves and poured out our stories, and she was so sympathetic and gentle that we felt much better for it. She wouldn't go in to see Mother, she said, unless she was asked for; but Mother was still speechless and asked for no one, although she had been told that Pandora and Cressida were in the house.

The two specialists were to come down from London by an early train tomorrow, and both Father and Doctor Gerard were in despair at Mother's continued silence. If she wouldn't speak to them, how could they advise on her case? I came into the Room just as Doctor G. was saying: "You must be prepared, I fear, for them to recommend a Home. She could go as a voluntary patient, of course; no question of being certified."

Father said quite calmly: "If she has to go into a Home I shall go with her." And when Doctor G., spluttering rather, said that this was impossible, he added: "*You* know, Gerard, that this has been hanging over us for a very long time. During those years I've saved a lot of money; enough, I think, to buy, equip and staff a Home for Grace's sole use. I'm not interested in your National Health Service or anything of that sort; I want the best doctor and the best nurses, that's all; and until they can convince me that I'm upsetting Grace or doing her harm I shall stay with her. I will *not* leave her to go through this alone."

I remember wondering desolately: "But what will become of *us*?" And yet I was not really surprised. I had never doubted that Father would give his right hand, his life, or anything else he had for Mother, and that his loved daughters would be jettisoned too, if the need arose.

I went to tell Pandora, who was talking to Thisbe in the

dining-room. Thisbe was saying: "You're right, I believe, but how will they know, if she won't talk?"

They both fell silent as I came in.

I told them what I'd heard, and Thisbe said: "So *that* accounts for it, then! The money, I mean!" She looked pleased, as one looks pleased who writes in the last word of a crossword puzzle.

But Pandora's eyes filled with tears, and she said: "I sometimes think Father is a saint, poor darling. Oh, he doesn't deserve all this trouble!"

Father came in a little later. He was restless and couldn't stay alone. He said: "Doctor Gerard's gone up to her again. He thinks that she'll have to be frightened into talking, by the realization that if she doesn't talk people will think—will say——" He broke off and cleared his throat. "I didn't want her to be frightened," he said, pacing round the table.

"Anything would be better than this silence," said Thisbe.

Father turned to me. "Morgan, you heard what I was saying to the Doctor just now. Don't imagine, will you, that I've forgotten I have any daughters."

"No, darling," I said guiltily. "Of course I won't."

"If it—does come to that we'll make arrangements," he said vaguely, and began to walk up and down again.

Pandora said she would go and see Cressida, and Father said: "How is she?"

"Better," said Thisbe, "but still rather miserable."

"Father," I said, "I had a long talk with Cressida this morning. She—I'm afraid she—*meant* to get ill."

"What? Oh nonsense!"

"She did, Father. She was glad to be so bad because she really—she really wanted to die." The words sounded ridiculous in that familiar room.

Father said: "Oh, Morgan, we've all had moments in our childhood of thinking 'When I'm dead they'll be sorry!' Cressida hasn't grown up yet, that's all."

I said meekly: "Perhaps you're right, Father."

But Thisbe said: "I'm afraid it's more than that. She felt—she still feels—so dreadfully guilty, and that it's all her fault. She doesn't think we care for her, much, and she feels such a failure. Oh, Father, it isn't just nonsense."

Father's face was set for endurance and couldn't look more unhappy than it did already. But at this he said: "Oh dear God," very quietly, and added: "My fault of course; all my fault."

"*No*, darling!" I said. "Mine, and a little bit Thisbe's; but mostly mine for laughing at her and being altogether unkind and horrid." I was nearly crying, and Father patted my shoulder absently and said: "It's all right, my dear," and he patted Thisbe's too, when she said: "Yes, just as much my fault as Morgan's."

We were all trying to comfort each other, and none of us, I think, very far from tears, when Doctor G. came bounding into the room, rather flushed.

"It worked, Harvey, it worked! She's asking for you. You'd better go up now and try to reassure her!"

Father started towards the door. Then he paused, in misery. "How *can* I reassure her, till those men have been? *I* don't know what they'll say!"

"Tell her—well, tell her you'll stay with her," said Doctor G., and blew his nose loudly.

Father nodded and ran upstairs.

The day dragged on and the night came. We all felt tired and none of us was sleepy, and we couldn't stop thinking about the morrow. Poor Teresa, not allowed into Mother's room in case she should have another fright, followed her big sisters about until we found her hard to endure. I remember snapping at her, and her reproachful face which at once made me ashamed, and I remember trying to comfort her that night in bed by reading extracts from her beloved book *The Courtier*.

First I read a few words about music:

"Make me musike, wherein are harmonies sometime of base and slow, and otherwhile quick and of new devices, yet doe they all recreate a man, but for sundrie causes, as a man may perceive in the manner of singing that Bido useth which is so artificiall, cunning, vehement, stirred, and such sundrie melodies, that the spirites of the hearers move all and are inflamed, and so listing, a man would weene they were lift up into Heaven.

"And no lesse doth Marchelto Caro move in his singing, but with a more soft harmony, that by a delectable way and full of mourning sweetness maketh tender and pierceth the mind, and sweetly imprinteth in it a passion of great delite."

Dear little T., growing sleepy at last, said solemnly: "Your playing does that to me you know, Morgan. 'Sweetly imprinteth a passion of great delite.' "

"Oh, darling," I said, feeling humbled. "My playing's not nearly good enough to be spoken of like that."

"It's good enough for me. Don't you think if you were to play to Mother perhaps it might re-create her, too? Oh, do try, Morgan, you know she loves your playing, and think of David and Saul!"

For a moment I thought that it was a good idea, and then I doubted if I dared even try. For although Mother had spoken to me by now, had thanked me in her exhausted voice for the tea tray I'd carried up, and had even kissed me good night, I still could not help being afraid of her. I had to force myself to go near her bed and I was thankful when the kiss was over. I didn't think that I should ever be really at ease with her again, and I have never been able to play very well before strangers.

I said: "Darling, thank you for suggesting it. We'll wait till the doctors have been, shall we, and then see. Now I'll just read you one more little bit and then we must go to sleep."

"When the windowes then were opened on the side of the Pallaice that hath his prospecte towarde the high top of Mount Catri, they sawe already in the East a faire morning like unto the colour of roses, and all starres voyded, saving only the sweete Governesse of Heaven, Venus which keepeth the boundes of the night and day, from which appeared to blowe a sweete blaste, that filling the aire with a biting colde, began to quicken the tunable notes of the prettie birdes, among the hushing woods of the hills at hand."

Teresa was asleep before I stopped reading.

I think the next morning was the worst of all.

Doctor Gerard was to bring his two specialists round at ten, and had promised to take them away afterwards to give them lunch, so that they would not be left on our hands. He was rather flurried to have summoned two such notabilities, while Nurse Jeffreys obviously looked forward with uncomplicated pleasure to their arrival. But the rest of us went about with pains in our tummies, and Thisbe remarked with mournful humour that anyone would think the whole family had taken castor oil. Cressida alone was not quite well enough to realize the situation; Nurse sat with her, being the only person able to sit still, and said that she was very much better. Father, of course, was with Mother.

The doctors arrived with remorseless punctuality and I showed them in. The two strangers were years younger than Doctor G. and very well-dressed. Beside them he looked old and rather ridiculous with his out-of-date jacket, bow tie and narrow tweed trousers; the watch chain we'd all played with still spanning his thin little waist. He was as shy as a schoolboy and had no smile for me. They went upstairs and I heard them go into Mother's room.

That was the very longest morning we've ever had to

live through. We sat on the attic stairs opposite Mother's door—Thisbe, Pandora, Teresa and I—and listened to the voices coming faintly through it. We huddled close together for comfort; we shivered, and tried to talk but kept falling silent. Now and then one of us would go in and see Cressida, who weighed down the consciences of us all except Teresa. Thisbe and I felt chiefly to blame and could not hold Pandora at all responsible; but she insisted that she had not tried hard enough to come close to Cressida, and had for years underrated her. I wondered whether our sedulous attentions, now that she was ill, would be worth very much to poor Cressida, and decided that it all depended on our keeping them up when she was better.

Mrs. Phillips finished her work downstairs and went reluctantly home, to add—no doubt—to the story she unfolded daily for her husband. Our state of tension was great fun for her, and Thisbe said tartly that it was nice someone enjoyed the situation. After she'd gone we sat and listened to the far off penetrating little tune of a tap that she'd left dripping. "Plep, plip, plup." It was hard to bear, and yet none of us would go down and silence it.

When at last Mother's door opened, we sat frozen, staring at the doctors as they came out. The two strangers looked up at us in some surprise, and then smiled compassionately, but Doctor G. only seemed worried and took no notice of us. They went into Father's dressing-room, and after a moment Father came out and said: "Whisky and soda and four glasses, please, one of you children. Don't wait about here, you'll only freeze and we may be some time." He tapped at Cressida's door and said: "Nurse, will you sit with Mrs. Harvey for a little?" And then, very upright and with his jaw set, he followed the others into the dressing-room.

Pandora took Teresa into the Room and heroically started a game of Halma. Thisbe and I put the whisky, the soda and the glasses on a tray, and tossed for who should

take it in. I won. None of us could remember Father's ever drinking whisky in the morning before.

I took the tray slowly upstairs, the glasses rattling, and went into the room. No one took any notice of me. Doctor Gerard, very red in the face, seemed to be defending himself. He said with painful dignity: "I can only say that I did my best, as I saw it, for my patient." And Father said quickly: "We know that, Gerard. No one doubts it in the slightest."

I waited for more, but the older and shorter of the strange doctors said: "How kind of you, Miss Harvey." And the younger and taller opened the door for me, so I had to go out. I at once fell on my knees with my ear to the keyhole, but I was ashamed to stay there as I thought Nurse Jeffreys would find me. All I heard was: "—a very great mistake, but made from motives no one would question."

Then I went downstairs and told the others that Doctor G. was getting a wigging.

Pandora and Thisbe glanced at each other and said nothing. The minutes laboured slowly on.

There comes a time, when one has been in a state of fear for too long, when numbness sets in; and we were all growing comatose—Teresa, indeed, had fallen asleep—when at last we heard the doctors come downstairs and drive away. Father saw them off, and we heard him thanking them and saying good-bye just as though nothing unusual had happened. From the window we saw him, as Doctor Gerard crept into the back of the car, lean after him and shake hands. Then the door shut, the car drove off and Father turned round so that we saw his face. He looked defeated.

"We were wrong!" whispered Pandora. "They're going to take her away. Oh, poor Father."

We heard him shut the front door and come slowly across the hall, and he opened the door quietly and came in. He looked at Teresa and touched her silky hair and then he whispered: "Tired out! Put a rug over her, children, and come and talk to me in the kitchen where it'll be warmer."

We covered her up and went with lagging steps into the kitchen, and there, sunk in a chair, tired to death, Father told us what had happened.

Mother, he told us bluntly, was not and never had been insane. She was, however, highly strung, and years of having her own way had made her unbalanced when thwarted. She had in particular a horror of losing her children which had started in a small way, showing itself in disapproval of our childish friendships and had gradually, unchecked, grown into what we'd seen the other morning. She had, in fact, played up to us, and consciously or unconsciously traded on Doctor Gerard's belief in her mental instability. Had she been laughed at or firmly opposed in the beginning her mania would never have developed.

Father got so far with his eyes shut, as though rehearsing in his sleep a distasteful lesson. After a pause he opened them and continued, with more animation:

"That is the doctors' decision and we cannot dispute it. But I must add that I'm convinced that her behaviour was unconscious. She was genuinely certain that she might go mad and she could feel her control—her only guarantee of sanity—slip when anxieties were aroused by her children's behaviour. She was intensely frightened—no one can know how frightened she was, except me."

Father leant forward in his chair and fixed his blue eyes on Pandora's face. She looked back at him quietly.

"Pandora, something she said made them think that you —as it were—saw through all this. That you didn't believe in her danger and that she realized this and so did not oppose your marriage." He paused, watching her. Pandora shook her head without speaking. Her eyes were full of tears. Father went on: "That would mean, of course, if it were true, that she knew what she was doing, and finding you inconvenient, and likely to infect your sisters, decided to let you go." Another long pause. "It's not true, is it?" said Father quite casually.

"No, Father." Pandora never took her wet eyes

from his face. "I don't know why she let me marry James."

He gave a deep sigh. "I felt sure you'd say that. Well, now that that—shadow—is banished we'd better face facts. First of all, I am entirely to blame, from start to end. I've made her worse and I've sacrificed you children to do it. All that will be changed now."

"Father"—I'm afraid I burst into tears as I spoke—"you're *not* to blame. You've been wonderful. You only believed Doctor G."

"Poor old Gerard," said Father. "He feels as bad as I do. He's perfectly willing to dig himself a grave and let the specialists shovel all the blame on to his head. No, he was wrong, but I should have known. I thought I was the only person who understood her."

"*I* think," said Thisbe, "that Aunt Agnes was largely responsible."

"Oh yes, let's blame the dead by all means." He spoke harshly, and Thisbe shrank back. "Gregory's dead, too, now, let's pin some of it on to him."

"I only meant——" said Thisbe.

"You meant to be kind, my dear, I know. It's true that Agnes spoilt her and taught her to consider herself delicate and not-to-be-thwarted. Gregory always disapproved of that, and he warned me about it when we were married. But I didn't understand or believe him. I thought with my love and care for her I could cure her completely. Well, I could have too! I know I could have if I'd had the sense to listen to him and go about it in the right way. I could have freed her mind from this fear, and then we could all have lived normal——" He stopped speaking, and none of us felt able to utter a word.

At last Pandora, clearing her throat, asked: "And now?"

"Now," he said, "we must set our house to rights." He got up and went over to the window. Having told us the worst of it, he sounded calmer now and he stood filling his pipe and looking at the almond tree, whose last pink

blossoms, brown-edged, were falling on the grass. It was raining thinly, I remember; the kind of soft dull spring day I normally delight in.

Pressing the tobacco down, Father spoke without turning round. "I shall have to send you children out into the world. This house will be a bad place to live in for some time to come. We are to have two nurses at first, as the shock to your Mother of finding her wishes disregarded might make her temporarily suicidal." He spoke matter-of-factly, and none of us exclaimed. "Later, I hope, we shall get rid of them, and of course you will all come very often for visits as she improves. The important thing is for none of you to suffer as poor little Cressida is suffering. You must all get away from this morbid atmosphere and have some fun. I've saved some money, enough to settle a sum on each of you and to keep us going even if my writing is—upset, which may happen of course."

"*Father!*" I protested.

"I'm only facing facts, Morgan. I'm not out to martyr myself, I assure you, but it may not be very easy for a time, and I expect my output will go down—but I'll get over that, I know.

"There's nothing to pay on this house, now that Gregory's dead; and of course you, Pandora, are catered for by James, though I shall still give you a dress allowance.

"As for the rest of you—Thisbe, what do you want to do? Write?"

Thisbe nodded. "Write now and get married later," she said calmly.

"To anyone in particular?"

"I'll tell you when it's fixed."

"All right. A very sensible decision. And you, Morgan? The piano?"

"Father, I wish I knew!"

"Think it over, my dear; there's no need to rush. I suppose Cressida will want to grow tomatoes or something."

"And Teresa? Oh, Father, not boarding-school. It'll kill her!"

"People aren't so easily killed," said Father sharply.

"She must come and live with us," said Pandora, "and go to a day school."

"Good of you, my dear, but I can't have James swamped by your sisters. You've not been married long."

"Teresa wouldn't swamp anyone, and James loves her," said Pandora.

"So——" began Thisbe, and paused, adding lamely: "—do we all."

"We're going much too fast, of course," said Father. "But the best thing to do when you're down is to make plans. You've all been very good. I shall find it hard to forgive myself, but you'll help by being as happy as you can, won't you?"

At this remark, on which he left the room, we burst unanimously into tears, and Nurse Jeffreys—who came in a moment later—found us all sobbing in separate corners with our backs carefully turned to one another.

"What, no dinner?" she said. "Mercy on us! What a lot of sad girlies! What are you doing, planning your funerals or something?"

We turned upon her glances of blistering hate, but she never noticed. She began to get the trays ready for Mother and Cressida. "Can't have *those* faces going near my patients," she commented. "Where's Teresa? She'd better take the sister's dinner up, if she can show a smile, and I'll do the Mummys's myself."

She went to look for Teresa, and Pandora said: "I'd better go too, and tell T. everything's going to be all right." She went out quickly and Thisbe and I were alone.

"Thisbe," I said. "Was it Patrick you meant when you said you'd like to get married later?"

"What made you think so?"

"I don't know. Thumbs pricking, I suppose. You nearly

said that he loved Teresa, didn't you? When Pandora said it about James."

"Yes, old astute one, I very nearly did. Well, he is on the cards."

"Why didn't you tell us?"

"Because I didn't want any—interference, while I was getting to know him. We've been meeting every day for walks."

"No one would interfere now."

"Now it's different. It wouldn't be fair to tell everyone he's proposed until I know what I'm going to answer."

"Proposed! Oh, Thisbe, you *are* lucky!"

"You do like him a lot then, Morgan?"

"What? Oh, yes I do, but I meant—how *lovely* to have had a proposal. Don't you long to tell everyone about it?"

"Funnily enough," said Thisbe, and her smile for once was gentle, "no, I don't at all. But it will be nice to talk to you about him, now and again."

The others came in then, and we began hurriedly to lay the table. Pandora took the stew out of the oven. It smelt good, and I suddenly discovered that I was wildly hungry.

CHAPTER XXIII

I AWOKE in the middle of the night and lay listening. A door closed softly downstairs—that would probably be Nurse, who was addicted to late cups of tea. I could hear a goods train labouring up a distant rise, but otherwise all was hushed for there was no movement in the air tonight.

I slid out of bed and put on my warm dressing-gown. I was alert as though I'd been awake for hours. I would sit on the window-sill and watch the train go by, for tomorrow night I should not be here.

Rolled in covers I hugged my knees and tried to see the garden, but there was no moon to look back at me "with silent delight" and I could barely make out the mass of the cedar tree. My chimney, mounting guard over the elementals, might not exist. A soft rain was falling in silence.

The train came to the end of the garden, lit romantically by its own red fire. Smoke gushed into darkness, and a tiny black figure rose upright focusing the scene for an instant with a sort of nobility of bearing that gave coherence to the whole; then the fantastic moment was gone and only a long line of trucks could be heard hurrying obsequiously past, in the dark. A feeling of desolation came upon me as the clank and rattle died away. I have always hated to see anything go, and tonight I was losing so much.

Everything had been decided, and the last week—since the visit of the mental specialists—had been a rush. Plans had been made and altered, boxes packed, letters written, and Cressida kept busy and not allowed to mope. Tomorrow we four girls were to go to a seaside hotel, and there spend Easter. Cressida needed sea air, and none of us was feeling very robust. After Easter Cressida was to go

to a college of domestic science, which she had chosen in preference to the out-door life we'd all thought her so fond of. And Thisbe and I were to live in a hostel in London.

It was an exciting prospect, and now and then a beam of anticipation would pierce the shadow in which I lived. I knew that I should be happy again. But not yet—oh, not just yet. Beautiful Mother, my beloved idea of her destroyed; how could I reconcile my life's habit of loving her with my new knowledge of her nature?

Pandora's denial to Father hadn't convinced me for a moment. I knew now, as she had always known, why Mother had let her go to James. And I knew what she had done, for more years than I could remember, to Father. At moments I felt choked with sick hatred, and there had been days when I had refused to go into her room, because I could not look at that sad, weary, cruel face.

But now, in the silence after the train's passing, I felt for the first time a healing warmth of compassion. For however you looked at it, and whatever her incomprehensible motives, Mother must have been terribly distressed, or she would not have needed to behave like that.

My own plans were still uncertain. I had faced facts, and had bitterly decided that I could never succeed as a concert pianist, and that I should not therefore make music my career. It seemed hard at this moment to part from another cherished illusion. During Easter I would decide what I wanted to learn and to be, and then Thisbe and I would go out daily to lectures at one of the polytechnics. Thisbe herself was enviably certain that she was a poet. She would study English Literature, but she wasn't sure how long she would manage to remain single, for Patrick was apparently impatient.

Teresa was to go to a day school, but she didn't know it yet. We hoped that she would make friends with the child who lived next door to Pandora; so one of Cressida's well-meant schemes was to be tried out. If they liked each other, and went to school together, it would be easier for the poor

little thing, but I couldn't help worrying about her. She was miserable at being sent away from Mother, in whom her faith was quite unshaken, and she didn't, like the rest of us, find comfort in the thought of an adventurous future.

Cressida was our main worry. Pandora had told me that Gregory had proved a disappointment, as he'd not taken Cressida as seriously as she would have liked. That had been one more slap at her self-esteem, and it would be hard for her to get over the whole miserable sequence of humiliations. Over Easter we were to do our best for her, but knowing my impatient nature I was secretly glad that the Easter holidays were short. We all had great hopes that at College, with her looks and her domestic efficiency, she would make a name for herself.

I did hope that she would find some more interesting young men than Gregory to take her out and give her fun. In retrospect he was—I felt it with some shame—an ineffectual prig; whereas his despised namesake, our late uncle, was now known to have had a helpful influence on our lives. I feared that I'd lacked discrimination.

I stood up, yawning and meaning to go back to bed. But instead I tiptoed past Teresa and opened the door. Silence, except for the distant, slightly uneven tick of the grandfather clock. On an impulse I began to creep down the attic stairs.

Mother had a night-light and I could see that her door was open. I took off my slippers and stood on the cold oilcloth of the landing. I hesitated for what seemed a long time; then I laid my slippers down on the step and stole into her room.

It seemed warm and yellow in there after the darkness outside, and my toes were glad of the carpet. I looked at Father who lay on his back, one arm flung across his eyes in protest against the light. He looked young and

unworried, and I would have liked to kiss him, but dared not risk disturbing his sleep.

Then I drew slowly near to Mother's bed, and stood at last gazing down on her worn but utterly peaceful face. How many thousands of times, I wondered, had she looked like this upon my childish face asleep, tucked in a blanket or lifted a falling limb and crept away, her protective work done? I couldn't accept all those years of tenderness only to turn against her now. Dear Mother, with her painting, her wit, her instant sympathy with our small experiments in art, her enormous if mistaken love for us. She was still there, unchanged. I hadn't really lost her. I bent down and just touched her hand with my lips before I went upstairs.

As I wriggled back into bed I thought again of Cressida. We had just escaped the sort of tragedy that one could never get over. How lucky we were. We would go on being lucky; we would have a lovely time.

I should meet new people, hundreds of young men and women, and among them would be my friends. I would become famous at—something or other, and I would be much beloved. In about ten years' time I would marry.

I lay smiling in the dark. There were wonderful things ahead, and I would not look back or regret what was gone. "But," I thought with a pang, "we shall never really be a family again. That part is done, and it was everything while it lasted.

"That part of our story is ended now."